

China Struggles for International Recognition—An Explanation from Chinese Face Culture

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Abbreviations

AFP	Agence France Presse
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asia
AU	African Union
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
EU	European Union
G20	Great Power 20
JDAM	Joint Direct Attack Munition
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
ROC	Republic of China
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
US	United States

Chapter 1

The Struggle for International Recognition—An Essential Task for China

世事洞明皆学问

人情练达即文章

--- 曹雪芹

A grasp of mundane affairs is genuine knowledge.

Understanding of worldly wisdom is true learning.

—Cao Xueqin

Anyone with even a basic understanding of Chinese diplomacy will agree that China has a strong desire for, and makes constant endeavours to gain, international recognition. Compared with other international actors, for China and its people, this intangible objective is extremely important.

It is no exaggeration to say that the struggle for international recognition is a key goal for the country, having already taken up much of its time and resources. Whether it is the Olympic Games in 2008, the APEC Summit in 2014, the G20 Hangzhou Summit in 2016 or the recent Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the Chinese government is commonly

believed to be the most generous and devoted organiser of large-scale international events, seizing every opportunity to ‘position itself as a state worthy of acceptance and respect among the major global players’ (Bolewski & Rietig, 2008, p. 83). Since the time of former President Hu Jintao, China has made large investments in improving its public diplomacy and on building a positive image internationally (e.g. the global presence of the Confucius Institute and national advertising campaigns aimed at enhancing China’s image). Beijing’s ambition is clear and explicit: to make more foreigners believe in a rising and benign China.

Simultaneously, both Chinese officials as well as the Chinese public are extremely sensitive to comments made about China internationally and are very easily angered by international misrecognition or non-recognition. The Chinese Foreign Ministry’s spokespeople regularly warn Western governments not to make ‘irresponsible remarks’ about China’s internal affairs. In the process of conducting public diplomacy, officials are usually fearful of alternative or different voices that might harm their national image or disrupt their strategy of promoting only self-glorifying themes (e.g. peaceful development, never seeking hegemony, the Chinese dream) (Lee, 2016, p. 112). Regarding foreign politicians or international organisations, there is constantly a clear-cut stand on whom to favour and whom to dislike. Many ‘Old Friends of Chinese People’¹ like Henry Kissinger and Gerhard Schroeder are beloved for confirming China’s high status as well as its claims to international recognition—the Nobel Prize Committee and Amnesty International are both often criticised for withholding such validation

¹ In China’s diplomatic vocabulary, ‘Old Friend of Chinese People’ [Chinese: 中国人民的老朋友] is a very special title in the official parlance, used to describe foreign leaders who have shown their strong support and positive recognition of China (*China Digital Times*, 2016). This term often appears in Chinese leaders’ speeches and reports in China’s official media.

(Gries, 2005, p. 244).

This tendency to seek international validation leads to some questions: Why do the Chinese seek foreign praise and seek to avoid criticism at any cost? What is the real purpose behind this endeavour? Sometimes, China tenaciously persists in its own way no matter what others say, and sometimes it indulges in self-trivialisation, akin to slavishly following in others' footsteps. What then is China's true character? Among the many bewildering or conflicting images, which one does China really want others to focus on? Is there any coherent behavioural rulebook behind China's seemingly arbitrary struggle? Do the Chinese support or oppose their government's endeavours? After so many efforts, do they feel their country has been recognised by the international community?

'Broadly stated, recognition matters to international politics because it represents the process through which actors come to exist as actors within the international system and take on a particular identity within that system' (Greenhill, 2008, p. 344). In other words, a deep-seated problem of international recognition is how a state regards itself and engages with others. This book does not intend to cover the entire breadth of this issue but aims instead to examine China's strenuous struggle for international recognition based on native Chinese culture, to present a vivid description of the true Chinese temperament and the sophisticated hypocrisy involved in China's diplomatic behaviours and, finally, to present the various opinions of Chinese citizens about their contentious country and its place in an uncertain global environment.

You will see an expected China, and also an unexpected China. Written by a Chinese researcher, this book is aimed at both foreign and Chinese readers who may be interested in China's contemporary diplomacy. For foreign readers, the author wants you to know that China's diplomacy is not as ambitious, irrational or inflexible as you may observe or regard on the surface; for Chinese readers, the author hopes you realise that our country is not as virtuous, considerate or popular as our government propagandises.

Before presenting the research questions, below are explanations of some key terms that will be used in this book.

1.1 International Recognition

1.1.1 Thin recognition and thick recognition

In this book, 'international recognition' refers to the acknowledgement of the sovereign equality and particular qualities that characterise an actor in the context of international relations. Indeed, politicians seldom refer to this concept directly but more often use other terms interchangeably like 'honour', 'prestige', 'reputation', 'praise', etc.

Social psychology shows that recognition is a fundamental human need, 'a deep-seated anthropological fact of the matter about the intersubjective nature of human beings' (Kompridis, 2007, p. 278; see also, Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 145). As social creatures, we need to be both equal to and different from others; we want to be acknowledged as equal individuals and also 'as a clearly identifiable someone with a life that is uniquely our own'

(Ringmar, 2010, p. 7). Because recognition cannot be achieved automatically, each person has no alternative but to 'fight for what he/she takes him/herself to be' (Ringmar, 2002, p. 120).

In line with these psychological appeals, international recognition can be categorised into 'thin' and 'thick' recognition.

Thin recognition

'International recognition takes place most visibly when an existing government announces that another political entity has become a sovereign state' (Agne, 2013, p. 94). Such recognition can be described as 'thin recognition' i.e. 'being acknowledged as an independent subject within a community of law' (Strombom, 2014, p. 171; see also, Moller, 2007, p. 60; Wendt, 2003, p. 511).² The essence of this recognition is to grant an actor sovereign equality, only through which one can attain 'the juridical status of an independent, sovereign entity' (Ibid.) and become a legitimate member in the context of international relations. Certainly, sovereign equality is not equality of power 'but only equality in the sense of belonging to the same fundamental category, of being the same kind of subject' (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 4).

For most of the period following World War II, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the

² Some scholars believe that international recognition is still an essentially political issue as opposed to a legal one. Agne (2013, p. 103) argues that 'any procedures of international law are all premised on particular views on who the legitimate subjects are'. Yongjing Zhang (2015, p. 308) claims that legitimization i.e. the process of achieving recognition, is 'a realm of political action and a contending site of politics, involving negotiated accommodations and compromises contingent on the exercise of power'.

Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan both claimed to be the sole legitimate government of China (Rich, 2009, p. 160). Even today, both sides are engaged in an enduring battle over diplomatic recognition. On 14 June 2017, Panama abruptly switched its diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing, which left the ROC only 20 formal diplomatic partners, compared to 175 that recognise the PRC. This is a typical contest for thin recognition. In order to win this competition, Beijing attempts making the *One China* principle become a globally accepted consensus³ and, thus, effectively hampers Taiwan's official participation in international activities.

Thick recognition

Thick recognition points to an actor's alterity and calls for the acknowledgement of a 'difference or uniqueness, or a particular identity' (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 2; see also, Wendt, 2003, p. 521). Through this recognition, a state can attain a distinctive and/or respectful social standing in relation to others. For Strombon (2014, p. 171), only when one acquires the thick recognition of the other, 'empathy towards the feelings and experience of the other group might be achieved'.

There are mainly two kinds of thick recognition that most countries focus on: one is aimed towards power status, more often just equivalent to obedience to material strength; the other is

³ When establishing formal diplomatic relations with the PRC, almost every country should express its clear support for the 'One China' principle. The official statement of this principle is that 'only one China exists in the world, the Government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government that represents all of China, and Taiwan forms an inalienable part of Chinese territory'.

about the actor's ideological or normative particularness. On 31 December 2013, when talking about how to promote China's soft power, President Xi Jinping advocated enhancing China's international image as 'a more approachable, hopeful and energetic socialism great country' (Xinhua News Agency, 2013). Needless to say, the typical aim of such an image is thick recognition—that foreigners should understand and accept China's particularity with regard to its political and social systems.

1.1.2 Why does international recognition matter?

The most important function of international recognition is to accord the actor (as well as its behaviour or value or relationship with others) legitimacy i.e. to enable it to seem internationally or domestically acceptable and right. Very often, international recognition has the potential of fungibility. For example, the mere confirmation of one's specific qualities can naturally expand to an admiration for that actor's entire entity. Moreover, recognition gained in one context can be transplanted to another context (Tang, 2005, p. 41). According to Finnemore (2008, p. 62) and Zhang (2015, p. 309), recognising a hegemon's legitimacy always implies at least the tacit acceptance of the social structures in which its power is exercised.

Based on this, recognition is often sought by international actors as a kind of social currency, which helps nurture mutual trust, consolidate solidarity, reduce careless unilateral moves and expand cooperation among actors (Snidal, 1991; Wendt, 1994; Kelman, 2005, p. 649). It is tempting to conclude that if the desire of all the actors in this world is fully satisfied, we can

expect that society as a whole would become more stable (Wendt, 2003, pp. 32-33).

In addition, international recognition can also contribute a state's domestic solidarity and regime legitimacy. The simple truth is, 'if a group's subjectivity is not recognized by other groups, then its members will not recognize either' (Ibid., p. 37). As commonly observed, China's struggle for international recognition first serves as a source of domestic legitimacy, and the main target audience is not outside China but inside the PRC.

From a psychological perspective, 'recognition is fundamental to securing a healthy sense of subjectivity, since without it actors may feel shame and humiliation' (Browning, 2015, p. 199).

In the same way, being denied the recognition one expects easily leads to uncontrollable international antagonism or conflict. Punitive and discriminating peace treaties, verbal depreciation of the other's status and harsh injunctions, such as ultimatums, can all trigger national grievance and violent reactions (Lindemann, 2011, p. 216). Tang (2005, p. 46) argues that too many wars have been waged in the struggle for international recognition. During the Cold War alone, the two superpowers fought at least three large-scale wars (Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan) and were involved in countless proxy conflicts for the sake of their reputation (or their prestige, honour and credibility)' (Ibid.). Forsberg (2014, p. 262) believes that the lack of genuine recognition of Russia's immense power is often viewed as 'a primary reason why Russia has turned away from cooperating with the West on a number of issues'.

1.2 China: Still a Marginalised 'Other'

Gaining international recognition, especially from the Western powers, has never been easy for the PRC. Even though China stands at the threshold of the club of international superpowers, it is still frequently and widely considered as a marginalised 'other' in the international community (Suzuki, 2007, p. 24).

The current China desires thick global recognition, but in this it faces two dilemmas :

1) Since the modern age, China has never fully been accorded the status of being a great power by most countries as well as many other international actors. As 'the most status-conscious country in the world' (Deng, 2008, p. 8), China definitely wants to be viewed as a great power, at least in the material sense. However, in many people's eyes, even though China's economic growth over the past decades has led to the possibility that it will take on a leadership role, China today is still only a partial power, lacking sufficient strength (both material and spiritual) to provide public goods for the international market, to influence major international issues and to actively solve problems (Liang, 2016; Shambaugh, 2013, p. 309). Volgy et al. (2014, p. 63) view China as 'a perennial status underachiever—a country that lacks full status proportional to its capabilities and behavior'.

2) In the words of Western academia, the PRC never enjoys full membership of the global international society mainly because it obdurately maintains its stance as a country that does not abide by human rights norms and is not a standard democratic country (Clark, 2014, p. 334; Friedmann, 2011, p. 10; Lindemann, 2010, p. 151). In international society, recognition is

always awarded with reference to the dominant normative structure of that society (Reus-Smit, 2007, p. 165). In the world today, 'liberal democracy is widely regarded as the only legitimate form of domestic governance in international politics' (Zhang, 2015, p. 306). China, which denies the universality of Western liberal democracy and devotes itself to the *Social Democratic Political System of Chinese Characteristic*, is doomed to be labelled as 'a perceived threat to the liberal world' (Breslin, 2013, p. 322), 'a potential challenge to the normative changes in the international society' (Zhang, 2011, p. 242) or as 'one of the outsiders from the liberal global order' (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 64).

Chinese people always feel that the world treats China unfairly and believe that their efforts to seek international recognition do not receive the appropriate response or respect from the international community. They complain that Westerners habitually wear 'coloured glass' [Chinese: 有色眼镜] when observing and commenting on China. One of my Chinese friends once complained, 'India has much more domestic problems and social unfairness, but as the so-called largest democratic country, it can gain "democratic peace" with the West. Contrarily, in the eyes of Westerners, the wrong thing China did must be wrong, and the right thing China did is still possibly wrong'.

Beijing chronically holds the Western media responsible for creating a negative or distorted image of China (Hooghe, 2005, p. 91; Brady, 2015, p. 51). The author who has been used to the style of the Western media sometimes still feels aggrieved about its discriminatory reports about China. One typical case is a news piece from the Associated Foreign Press (AFP) entitled 'Light Rail Fails to Fix Ethiopia's Traffic Troubles'. This report extensively covered Addis

Ababa's residents' 'complaints' about their first electric light railway track, which was financially supported and built by Chinese state-owned companies. Some excerpts are below:

"It's better than nothing", said retiree Zerayakob Assefa, dismissing the half a billion dollar investment with a shrug as he waited for a train to the city's eastern suburbs. When one did arrive, 15 minutes later, it was so packed he could not board.'

'With ticket prices from \$0.10 to \$0.30, the train is comparable to the cost of a bus ride but the light rail is overcrowded and the network reaches only certain neighbourhoods, commuters said.'

'Some even blamed the light railway for increasing traffic. While the tracks are elevated in parts of town, in others they cut between and through lanes of traffic, leaving thoroughfares snarled with cars, complained minibus driver Amin Ansar.'

The entire report had an acrid tone and kept implying that this project was counterproductive and that Africa's reliance on China is risky. I truly understand and respect the critical attitude of the reporter, but I would still like to ask him/her two questions: 1. If this light railway is so useless, where is the crowd coming from? 2. For any big city in the world, would simply one light railway be able to solve all its traffic problems?

Beijing's foreign policy decision-makers clearly know that it is impossible to change China's fate as a marginalised other in the short term, but they still regard international recognition as a key diplomatic goal, worthy of tenacious struggles. For them, the struggle for recognition is an

essential task, which can at least reduce ‘the suspicion or misconception that will undercut the cultivation of a positive environment for its socioeconomic system’ (Liao, 2013, p. 553). The Chinese government’s own argument is as follows:

We sincerely hope that the international community will have a deeper appreciation of China’s time-honored cultural traditions, and respect its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and social stability, which the Chinese people hold dear... We also hope that the international community will have confidence in the Chinese people’s sincerity and determination to achieve peaceful development, and support rather than obstruct China’s pursuit of peaceful development. (Information Office of the State Council, PRC, 2011)

Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, any foreigner’s recognition is believed to be beneficial for domestically legitimising the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule.

1.3 Face Culture: A Muse for the Chinese

As an idea, ‘face’ [Chinese: 面子; Pinyin: *mianzi*] constitutes ‘the most curious point of Chinese social psychology’ (Lin, 1936, p. 190) and the most delicate standard epitomising the ethical and relational rules of Chinese society. Anyone who wishes to truly understand China’s focus on and behaviours towards gaining social recognition would have to necessarily understand Chinese face culture.

Face culture originated in the cross-cultural communication between Chinese people and

Westerners in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Di, 2011, p. 13-14). By then, many of the books about China written by Westerners included records of this remarkable Chinese national characteristic.⁴ The book *Chinese Characteristics*, written by American missionary Arthur H. Smith and published in 1894, is widely recognised as the first work of literature to introduce Chinese face culture. Drawing on the following quotations from these pioneering works, we can see what position face culture has in Chinese social communication from the foreigners' perspective:

'At first sight, nothing can be more irrational than to call that which is shared with the whole human race a 'characteristic' of the Chinese. But the word face does not in China signify simply the front part of the head but is literally a compound noun of multitude, with more meanings than we shall be able to describe or, perhaps, to comprehend.' (Smith, 1894, p. 16)

'Face is one of the most potent and, at the same time, one of the most amusing words in the Chinese language... It represents an idea that permeates the whole of society. It may be said to be the one dramatic element that makes every Chinese a play-actor, and his own life the stage on which he acts the farces and comedies that are constantly being played in everyday life.'

(Macgowan, 1912, p. 301)

⁴ See, for example, Smith, A. H. (1894). *Chinese Characteristics*. Revell; Holcombe, C. (1895). *The Real Chinaman*. Dodd, Mead; Macgowan, J. (1909). *Lights and Shadows of Chinese Life*. North China Daily News & Herald Limited; Russell, B. (1922). *The Problem of China*. Century; Wilhelm, R. (1928). *The Soul of China*. Lethe Press.

‘The business of saving face, which often strikes foreigners in China as ludicrous, is only the carrying out of respect for personal dignity in the sphere of social manners. Everybody has “face”, even the humblest beggar.’
(Russell, 1922, p. 463)

Also, in the late 19th century, ‘the figurative use of face in English was borrowed into the English lexicon from Chinese by the missionaries and diplomats’ (Haugh & Hinze, 2003, p. 1587). More precisely, ‘face’ is a literal translation of two Chinese words—*‘lian’* [脸] and *‘mianzi’*. Even today, some scholars still seek to clarify the nuances of these two words.⁵ However, it seems to be an endless and impossible task, as the meanings of *lian* and *mianzi* ‘vary according to verbal context and in addition are not completely differentiated from each other in that the terms are interchangeable in some contexts’ (Ho, 1976, p. 868). In this research, I use the term ‘face’ only to mean *mianzi*, first because *face culture* in Chinese is invariably referred to as *mianzi culture* instead of *lian culture*. Moreover, compared with the word *lian*, the word *mianzi* bears more cultural implications regarding a person’s social relationships and interactions (Cheng, 2006, p. 34).

Inspired by the observations of Westerners, Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty and

⁵ The most cited argument about the semantic differences can be found in Hu Hsien-chin’s paper *The Chinese Concepts of ‘Face’* (1944). She defines *‘lian’* as ‘the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation’ and *‘mianzi’* as ‘a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation’ (1944, p. 45). There is still today an on-going theoretical debate about the meaning of *lia* and *mianz* especially from the perspectives of social psychology and linguistics. See, for example, Hwang, K. K. (2012). Face and Morality in Confucian Society. In *Foundations of Chinese Psychology* (pp. 265-295). New York: Springer. Haugh, M., & Hinze, C. (2003). A metalinguistic approach to deconstructing the concepts of ‘face’ and ‘politeness’ in Chinese, English and Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(10), 1581-1611.

the early Republic period (1890s–1930s) also attempted to give their own indigenous interpretations of face culture. Most of them adopted a poignantly critical attitude and regarded face culture as a poor characteristic of the Chinese nation. Lu Xun (1934, p. 129), one of the most renowned writers in China’s modern history, once wrote, ‘Face is the key moral to all the Chinese. It is like the pigtail everyone wore during the Qing Dynasty. Once seized by his or her pigtail, one could not move a single step, but was completely under another’s control’. In his view, face ‘becomes one of several makers of traditional China, which must be rejected in order for Modern China to become a modern nation’ (Andre, 2013, p. 71). Lu Xun (1934, p. 129) also points out the difficulty of defining or theorising the Chinese concept of face, ‘But what is this thing called face? It is very well if you do not think about it, but the more you think the more confused you will grow’. In his book *My Country and My People*, famous modern writer Lin Yutang (1936, p. 186) claims, ‘Face, Fate (obey hierarchical status), and Favor are three muses’ that have always ruled China. Among these three muses, the influence of face is the most remarkable, and it is certainly impossible to know the Chinese spiritual world without understanding the Chinese face system’ (Ibid.).

In 1944, sociologist Hu Hien-chin published the paper *The Chinese Concepts of Face* in the academic journal *American Anthropologist*. This constitutes the earliest academic resource on face culture research, as it was the first time the anthropological method was adopted to shed light on the history, meaning and usage context of Chinese face culture. In 1955, inspired by previous discussions on the Chinese concept of face,⁶ American sociologist Erving Goffman

⁶ See, Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18(3), 213-231.

(1955, pp. 213-231) posited his face theory to explain the common ritual elements in humans' struggle for social recognition. Following this, *face* rapidly became a significant concept in sociological research and was also extensively borrowed by communications, psychology, political science, business management and many other fields of social science.

To date, a large number of academic studies have been devoted to face culture, and, of course, there are widely varying interpretations and conflicting disputes associated with it. In spite of this, there is a basic consensus that face culture remains the most important feature of Chinese people and their culture. Despite its dramatic and rapid transformations across almost all aspects, China seems to have never given up its most important cultural characteristics (Faure and Fang, 2008, p. 194). Manifestly, the cult of face continues its status of a muse dominating Chinese behaviour and psychology while continuing to play its role as a key concept in unfolding China's past, present and future.

1.4 Face Culture and Chinese Diplomacy

Face culture appears very frequently in academic papers and media reports as the cause explaining China's diplomacy, and some Western writers even use the Chinese word *mianzi* directly to highlight this national characteristic. The general logic is that because the Chinese have a deep-seated dependence on face culture, China is bound to constantly crave for the

According to the references cited in this paper, it can be easily noted that Goffman assimilated many ideas from Hu Hien-chin's research and some Westerners' observations about Chinese face culture (for example, Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, Macgowan's *Lights and Shadows of Chinese Life* etc.).

international recognition of its projected images and, moreover, be impulsively and extremely sensitive to any less-than-honourable depictions of Chinese (Ding, 2011; Gries, 2004; Ho, 2015; Scott, 2015). However, there are very few academic works specifically examining the role of face culture in influencing China's foreign relations. Chinese people as well as foreigners have stereotyped this seemingly shallow cultural trait, commonly simplifying it as an overriding emphasis on vanity or an emotional aspect of nationalism.

A limited search of existing studies yields the following commonly held opinions:

1. Concern for face exists as a human need in worldwide diplomatic practices, and the concept of face is a valuable analytical element for research on diplomacy.

According to Goffman, diplomacy itself is a kind of face work. 'The ritualization of diplomacy, as well as everyday life, involves "face-work"—the development of repertoires of face-saving practices, including defensive ones to save one's own face and protective ones to save others' faces' (Goffman 1967, p. 12). He further argues that there is a need for human interaction to be conducted comfortably and hence human beings develop social behaviours in which the joint responsibility for this comfortable interaction is expressed (Goffman, 1956, pp. 264-271). For Adler-Nissen (2012, p. 6), 'diplomats are not only representatives of their states, but also defenders and performers of a particular social order'. 'Within diplomatic interaction orders (perhaps more so than in other types), a central issue is to avoid losing face' (Ibid., p. 7).

2. Face culture has played an important role in China's struggle for international recognition since the ancient times, and this continues until today.

In ancient East Asia’s tribute system, the legitimacy of China as the central country was derived from the Chinese rulers’ self-prescribed identity as the Sons of Heaven (Feng, 2011, p. 546). What was at stake then was the Chinese government’s constant risk of losing face—both among its people and before the outside world—and to be known as a ‘paper tiger’ if it was unable to ‘back up its claims of the right to rule with the provision of physical security’ (Ibid.). In order to highlight its face, China also designed a set of rituals that secondary states are expected to perform when seeking a relationship with China (Kang, 2010, p. 56).

With regard to China’s contemporary diplomacy⁷, Benjamin Tze Ern Ho (2015, p. 3) believes that face is still ‘one crucial element influencing the manner in which China relates with other nations’. Nathan and Scobell (2012, pp. 25-26) argue that, ‘face can be used to explain the uniqueness of Chinese diplomacy’. Huang and Bedford (2009, p. 573) claim that in Chinese culture, ‘face is an especially critical component to be considered, particularly in a circumstance that becomes public and formal’. Below are some academic explanations from the perspective of face culture:

China’s diplomatic cases	Explanation from the perspective of face culture
The Sino-Soviet split (1960-1989)	‘China did not experience any follower status in its dynastic history... China would feel offended because of <i>the rejection of face</i> , i.e., the appearance of being a worthy follower. When China is unable to reform this situation, an isolationist policy would be adopted’. (Shih, 1988, p 624)

⁷ Historically, the contemporary history of China normally refers to the period following the establishment of the PRC (1949).

‘China’s contemporary diplomacy’ here also refers to the diplomacy after the establishment of the PRC.

<p>Sino-Canada relations in 2009</p>	<p>'Harper's visit leads the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to make some public criticisms of Canada's tardiness in maintaining friendship with China... Wen's comment could be seen as not giving face to Harper, just as Harper, whose advisers were apparently ignorant of this Chinese tradition, had <i>failed to give face</i> when he skipped the Beijing Olympics'. (Lo, 2011, pp. 68-69)</p>
<p>Deng Xiaoping's strategy of 'keeping a low profile'⁸</p>	<p>'Deng Xiaoping's admonition that China should keep a low profile in international affairs also relates well with <i>the value of face</i>, given the risk-averse nature of Chinese culture'. (Hsee & Webber, 1999, pp. 165-179)</p> <p>'By keeping a low profile, the Chinese are able to guard against the loss of face should events or matters not go the way they had hoped'. (Ho, 2015, p. 13)</p>
<p>China's diplomatic discourse</p>	<p>According to comparative research on routine press conferences conducted by China's Foreign Affairs Ministry and the US Department of State, Jiang (2006, p. 251) finds that on China's side, 'avoidance and insufficient answers were prevalent but relatively few direct refusals were used'. The main reason is that 'in Chinese culture, it is necessary to <i>preserve the interlocutor's face</i> and to leave a way out for the refuser'. (Ibid., p. 252)</p>

⁸In 1990, in response both to the global backlash to the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 and to the collapse of the communist states of Eastern Europe, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping proposed his now famous strategy for Chinese diplomacy. Its core message was, 'keep a low profile and achieve something' [韬光养晦, 有所作为]. What this means is that China still needs to concentrate on its own development, hide its capabilities and avoid holding a position of leadership. See, for example, Chen, D., & Wang, J. (2011). Lying low no more? China's new thinking on the Tao Guang Yang Hui strategy. *China: An International Journal*, 9(02), 195-216; Suisheng, Z. (2010). Chinese foreign policy under Hu Jintao: The struggle between low-profile policy and diplomatic activism. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 5(4), 357-378.

China's public diplomacy	'A great irony of Chinese foreign policy is that <i>the strong desire for international affirmation</i> often leads China's elite to present a very bad face to the world. In trying to hide China's blemishes and maintain national face, Chinese bureaucrats have tirelessly harassed foreign journalists, their families and friends'. (Gries, 1999, p. 68)
Chinese perception of Africa	'If somehow the Chinese are seen as losing face in Africa, Internet users will respond rigorously and complain that Beijing has not done enough. Any negative behaviour, or simply negative comments, coming from Africa about China, are taken seriously by Chinese Internet users'. (Shen, 2015, p. 123)

Figure 1.1: Explanations of China's diplomacy from the perspective of face culture

As is evident in Figure 1.1, starting from the time of the Cold War through till the Post-Cold War era, whether in the case of macroscopic-level strategy or microcosmic-level discourse and whether in the official attitude or public perception, the concern for face has always been viewed as a factor that motivates China's struggle for international recognition.

Peter Gries is an American scholar who did some pioneering research on the nexus between face culture and China's diplomacy, although more often he regards face culture as a remarkable component of Chinese nationalism.⁹ In his view, face as an analytical concept has the following

⁹Gries' main studies on this issue are Gries, P. H. (1999). A 'China Threat'? Power and Passion in Chinese Face Nationalism. *World Affairs*, 63-75; Gries, P. H. (2001). Tears of rage: Chinese nationalist reactions to the Belgrade embassy bombing. *The China Journal*, 25-43; Gries, P. H., & Peng, K. (2002). Culture clash? Apologies east and west. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11(30), 173-178; Gries, P. H. (2004). *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

values (2004, pp. 23-25):

- Face helps capture the interplay of reason and passion that is central to nationalism.
- Face as a universal human concern can help us overcome the opposition of reason and passion common in the social sciences, providing a more nuanced account of human motivation.
- Face can help us understand how national identities are reshaped through international encounters and what are the complex motivations that drive nationalists.

3. Under the influence of face culture, Chinese diplomacy is perpetually manifested in two kinds of behavioural characteristics.

The first typical behaviour is that China is always eager to show off its power and leadership through its diplomacy and to seek positive recognition from international society (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 23). 'China has long suffered from the poor international image of being a weak soft power... Because the ruling Chinese Communist Party wants China to gain face in the international arena, it has in recent years invested heavily in boosting the country's international approval rating' (Brady, 2015, p. 51). According to Hooghe (2005, p. 93-94), the good face or favourable international recognition that China wishes to promote internationally is in the sense of being 'a stable trustworthy and responsible economic partner', 'a trustworthy and responsible member of the international community' and 'an ancient culture with a long

history' (Hooghe, 2005, pp. 93-94).

Gries (2004, p. 55) coined an interesting term—'Kissinger complex'—which means that the Chinese prefer 'to praise high-status foreigners who, like Kissinger, trumpet China's rise while downplaying its flaws' (Ibid.). As such, Chinese scholars Tang and Qi (2008, p. 67) point out that, 'we [Chinese] particularly the compliments from American politicians like Kissinger and Brzezinski. Any trivial praise from them will be expounded inside China'.

The other way in which this manifests is that China is 'vulnerable to lose face internationally and is hypersensitive to being shamed in the international court of public opinion' (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 23). The Chinese 'often seem overly emotional about China's national dignity' (Gries, 1999, p. 68). In order to cover their backs as well as to maintain face, Chinese officials constantly hold the Western media responsible for creating a negative or distorted image of China (Hooghe, 2005, p. 91; Brady, 2015, p. 51).

Two diplomatic crises are frequently mentioned in the context of losing face—the 1999 US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the 2001 China-US aircraft collision.¹⁰ During both these events, instead of first seeking private, personal deals before practical diplomacy,

¹⁰ On 7 May 1999, during NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, 5 US JDAM guided bombs hit China's embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese reporters and outraging the Chinese public. On 1 April 2001, over the South China Sea's airspace, a mid-air collision occurred between a United States EP-3E ARIES II signals intelligence aircraft and a People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy J-8II interceptor fighter jet. It resulted in the death of a PLA pilot, and the EP-3 was forced to make an emergency landing in Hainan, China. These two events resulted in immediate diplomatic crises between China and the United States, with the disputes mainly being over the cause of the accident, whether Washington should apologise and how it should apologise.

which is the conventional practice of the PRC leadership, Beijing 'preferred to work with the Americans through normal diplomatic channels' and tried to publicise the status of these negotiations as much as possible (Kan, 2001, p. 13). Obviously, these actions made it harder to solve the problems but also exemplified that at a time of crisis, 'the PRC tried to preserve face and cannot be seen as wrong by its people' (Ibid.). Similarly, as Gries (1999, pp. 70-72) shows, the Chinese propensity to view international offences against them as insults to its face, have rendered it very difficult for reconciliations to take place, even if formal apologies were made by the offending party.

4. Most scholars or reviewers hold negative views towards China's face diplomacy.

According to Chinese diplomat Yuan Nansheng (2011, p. 66), 'influenced by face culture, Chinese people always pursue vain glory instead of tangible national interests in international relations... We should keep away from such mentality caused by face culture in practice'. Cheng and Ngok (2004, p. 83) believe that diplomacy in Chinese terms is often seen as a competition for international recognition, due to the zero-sum nature of face and the West's historical victimisation of China. Ho (2015, p. 13) predicts that the Chinese sensitivity to losing national face can be 'a potential source of worry' that possibly leads to conflicts between China and its neighbours, because 'as China becomes stronger, it becomes more susceptible to losing face, especially among its own citizens'. Some remind the West of the trap set by the Chinese—the exchange of face as a practical tool of bargaining is one that China often utilises in its dealings with the West, which is usefully adapted to modern diplomacy (Nathan & Scobell, 2012, pp. 25-26).

Gries' idea (2004, p. 27) is more balanced: the Chinese tend to sacrifice relationships to protect face as well as constrain behaviour out of the fear of losing face, that is, 'the desire to maintain face can thus act as both a barrier and a facilitator of social interaction'. Gao and Ting-Toomy (1998) state that the concept of face is illustrated in the Chinese tendency to avoid conflict, especially when even if they stand to benefit from the conflict.

1.5 Research Questions

'China's rise may not have changed everything, but its dramatic re-emergence at the center of world politics throws familiar issues into newly sharp relief' (Beeson & Bisley, 2013, p. 290). Apparently, China's struggle for international recognition is to a great extent culturally construed and constructed, thereby acquiring some special features.

Plenty of studies have shown that face culture constitutes a basic Chinese value and behavioural logic for social recognition (see more in Chapter 3); correspondingly, this study assumes that face culture serves as a constructive force in Chinese diplomacy, prominent in shaping China's identity and behavioural models for seeking international recognition. This entire study is guided by the following core question:

How does Chinese face culture influence its struggle for international recognition?

This question can be further sub-divided into two questions for the feasibility of this research:

➤ *What national identities does China pursue and maintain in order to gain*

international recognition?

- *What behavioural strategies (especially discourse behaviours) does China conduct to highlight its identity?*

In answering these questions, this book tries to reveal not only the struggle for recognition but also the process through which China has come to be known as a particularised construct made up of multifarious or even seemingly paradoxical characteristics.

This study will use role theory to establish an analytical framework and a discourse analysis as the main methods. The related discussion will be conducted in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

Culture and Diplomacy

中国文化自古就认为世界应是一个和谐整体

—白皮书《中国的和平发展》

*The world has been believed to be a harmonious whole in
Chinese culture ever since ancient times.*

—White Paper, 'China's Peaceful Development'

This study assumes that a state's struggle for international recognition is about the constitution of group identities and ultimately about specific culture. In other words, face culture dictates the 'operational code' (George, 1969) of state behaviour. Before a concrete case study can be considered, it is necessary to clarify the various kinds of impact of culture on diplomacy from a theoretical perspective. Based on the existing literature, this chapter will propose a theoretical framework based on role theory.

2.1 Why Has Cultural Analysis Become Important?

In the field of international relations, for a long time, culture has been considered as an explanation of the last resort' (Pye, 1991, p. 504). 'Everything that cannot be explained by existing theories in foreign policy analysis is ascribed to cultural differences' (Hudson, 1997, p. 2). In recent decades, the perspective on culture has been re-examined and emphasized by the increasing number of decision makers, scholars and analysts. Such a shift is closely linked with the historical background and theoretical trends of international relations.

2.1.1 Historical background

Changing circumstances

Often, people think that the rise of cultural analysis in the field of international relations followed upon the end of the Cold War. 'The failure of mainstream International Relations theory to provide correct predictions and to explain outcomes caused many scholars and policy makers to re-engage with national, i.e., with the domestic and the non-material sources of foreign policy' (Bukh, 2010, p. 3). In fact, the analysis of cultural factors had begun long before the end of the Cold War. Gaenslen (1997, p. 267) claims that its present-day 'culture revival' can be traced back to the 1970s, when a series of political upheavals changed the world's political landscape. The political changes he refers to include the third wave of global democratisation, the continuing growth of the Islamist movement after the Iranian revolution, the burgeoning phenomenon of 'collapsed states, and, certainly the most notably, the demise of Marxist

regimes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia' (Ibid.).

If we broaden our view of the post-Cold War era, at least three more events can be added to the above list: 1) the 9/11 terrorist attack and the subsequent global war on terror, which seemed to confirm Huntington's (1993) notion that culture would serve as the new battleground for future political conflicts;¹¹ 2) the faster than expected European integration, which highlights the role of culture as a political instrument for transferring popular loyalty and sovereignty from nation-states to supranational entities (Shore, 2000, p. 1); 3) the remarkable rise of non-Western powers on the world stage, which prompted scholars around the world to re-examine the value and potential of non-Western cultures in the current changes of world order.

In the face of these transformations, both decision-makers and researchers felt impelled to consider global issues from a cultural perspective, especially with regard to 'the way regimes legitimize themselves and the way citizens identify themselves' (Street, 1994, p. 96).

Culture as a soft power.

'Soft power' is a concept developed by Joseph Nye to describe the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 1990; Nye, 2004). Since the 1990s, this term has been extensively used in international affairs by statesmen and analysts, as it

¹¹ As soon as the end of the Cold War, Huntington's 'Civilization Conflict Theory' strongly set academic agendas and provoked research in new directions, especially from the cultural perspective. See Huntington, S. P. (1993). The clash of civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3), 22-49.

provides them with 'a tool through which to refer to sources of influence other than military force and economic payoff' (Hall, 2010, p. 189). 'Increasingly unable to curb the rise of the emerging powers in political and economic fields, traditional powers increasingly pay attention to the use of soft power, thereby trying to continue their monopolization of international rule-making power' (Ye, 2010, p. 38).

Normally, soft power arises from the values an organisation or country expresses through its culture (Nye, 2009). Based on such a nexus, foreign policy decision-makers are committed to transforming a state's cultural resources into appealing soft power; the worldwide public has more opportunities to come into contact with the culture and national image of other countries through various forms of public or cultural diplomacy. For scholars, the relationship between a state's culture and its soft power is a topic worthy of extensive study.

The rise of non-Western powers.

After the Cold War, it became increasingly clear that 'the West was facing a massive challenge from other non-Western players in the world capitalist economy' (Cox, 2012, p. 371). In 2001, when Goldman Sachs put forth the idea of the 'BRICS' countries comprising Brazil, Russia, India and China, only a few economists took it seriously. However, the pace of change is much greater than people's imagination, and today the BRICS countries (now including South Africa) have become a significant political and economic group determined to promote a more representative and equitable world order.

Power shifts taking place today are believed to have far more complex implications than those from the last century, especially with regard to culture, since these emerging powers encompass their continuous and special civilizations for centuries. While Japan's modernisation began with the Meiji restoration in 1868 and included a total adoption of Western models, the same may not be true for China and India (Pethiyagoda, 2014). Researchers are already keen to summarise the non-Western powers' governance models or to predict their future trends based on certain cultural specificities. For example, off late, the concept of 'All-under-Heaven' [Chinese: 天下]¹² originating in ancient China has become a popular term to describe China's worldview and diplomatic trends, although the Chinese government itself has never mentioned this in any official capacity. Meanwhile, there are growing concerns about the possible cultural or value-based challenges to the West-dominated world. 'The BRICS countries' ambition to change the world in their image raises questions of fundamental values as well as geopolitical influence' (Tisdall, 2012).

2.1.2 Theoretical trends: Towards the actor-specific path

In the past, a cultural analysis of diplomacy had been long neglected or devalued, largely because it was categorised as an actor-specific method of analysis. However, mainstream studies on international relations have focused on actor-general theories, regarding

¹² According to Chinese philosopher Zhao Dingyang (2006, pp. 29-41), *All-under-Heaven* represents China's classical philosophy of world governance. It advocates a political goal i.e. 'to create "All-under-Heaven" the trinity of the geographical world (the earth), the psychological world (the hearts of all people) and the political world (the world institution)' (Ibid., p. 39).

international actors as unitary and rational, and they do not care about what kind of decision-making units the actors employ and how domestic units interact. Neorealism is a classic case—according to Waltz (1979, p. 96), differences between states ‘are of capability, not function’. ‘National politics consists of differentiated units performing specified functions. International politics consists of like units duplicating one another’s activities’ (Ibid., p. 97). As an extension of this logic, the actor-general theories almost only seek explanations at the systematic level.

As early as the 1980s, theorists had realised that there was not much room for the advancement of actor-general theories, which had thus far informed only a little amount of empirical research. Then, the sudden end of the Cold War totally exposed the inability of actor-general theories to predict and explain system-level and actor-level transformations. Hudson (2005, p. 5) points out that ‘with every system transformation, we rediscover that the power of the human will and imagination was greater than that of the straitjacket of the system rules’.

Also, in the same period, an increasing number of scholars began to recognise that actor-specific analysis also has its irreducible function in the explanation of international behaviours. This research path is generally based on anti-essentialist theory i.e. ‘the social world is constructed socially and discursively implies that its character is not pre-given or determined by external conditions, and that people do not possess a set of fixed and authentic characteristics or essences’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5). The most significant challenge to the hegemony of the actor-general theory emerged with the advent of constructivism. As opposed to the rationalist ontology of mainstream international relations studies, constructivists commonly deny that actors, be they individuals or states, deal with one another

with a pre-existing set of preferences (Reus-Smit, 2009, p. 3). Instead, their preferences and interests constantly change as they develop their identities in various ideational or normative environments and through different processes of interaction.

Most theorists who adopt the actor-specific approach also accept the role of systematic factors. A basic consensus has been achieved—‘neither a completely structural explanation nor a wholly agent-based one can capture the interplay between decision makers and the environment within which they function’ (Breuning, 2012, p. 31). For example, Wendt, from the very beginning of his theoretical constructions, has emphasised that both agent and structure matter. Both systematic and agent-based analyses ‘have distinct and irreducible functions in the explanation of social action, and they are both necessary elements of a complete explanation of social action’ (Wendt, 1987, p. 362).

The above-mentioned theoretical trends prompted researchers to probe more into actors’ autonomy and cultural sediments, and the various related theoretical models and research methods progressively enrich the cultural analysis of diplomacy.

2.2 Conceptualising Culture and Diplomacy

2.2.1 Defining culture

‘Culture’ is a notoriously difficult term to define. Generations of scholars have attempted to provide a plausible, pithy explanation, but the definition of this term has never been entirely clear. What puzzles people is not so much ‘what to include in such a definition, but rather what

to exclude' (Hudson, 1997, p. 2). If we were to apply a sense of all-encompassing logic, all human activities and creations—including diplomatic behaviours—can be described as products or components of culture. However, from the usual narrow point of view, religion, history, art and morality have been identified as more important in defining a culture. The slippery nature of this concept often makes scholars hesitant about stepping into the quagmire of a discussion about it (Liland, 1993, p. 1). One satisfactory definition for this study can be found in the work of Hofstede (1991, p. 5), a well-known cultural researcher.

'The collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.'

Although presenting a definitive definition of culture may be impossible, some of its characteristics have been recognised by the great majority of people. The following extract is from Helen Spencer-Oatey (2012, pp. 3-16):

- Culture is manifested as different layers of depth.
- Culture affects behaviour and interpretations of behaviour.
- Culture is associated with social groups, always both socially and psychologically distributed in a group.
- Culture has both universal (etic) and distinctive (emic) elements.
- Culture is subject to gradual change.
- The various parts of a culture are all, to some degree, interrelated.

- Culture is a descriptive, not an evaluative, concept.

This study regards Chinese face culture as a typical kind of national culture. Since culture is understood as a group-level construct, the cluster that invariably is most influential in creating and disseminating a specific culture is the nation. In the age of globalisation, there continue to be cultural differences within a nation (Inglehart & Wayne, 2000, pp. 19-51; Schwartz, 2008). ‘While at the surface level there may be some convergence in cultural habits, artifacts and symbols, at a deeper level, cultural differences persist’ (Ghemawat & Reiche 2011, p. 2).

In the sphere of political science, the analysis of culture used to be associated primarily with political culture, which emerged in the context of post-war political sociology (Wedeen, 2002, p. 713). However, the problem is that ‘definitions of political culture are virtually indistinguishable from definitions of general culture’ (Hudson, 1997, p. 10). Nowadays, political scholars prefer to adopt a more open view of culture, as shown in the next section. When culture is used in political research, no matter what form it takes (i.e. value, belief, history, myth, orientation, behavioural pattern etc.), it is generally believed to directly affect politics and political choices.

2.2.2 Defining diplomacy

This research regards China’s struggle for international recognition as a part of its diplomacy, or as a diplomatic behaviour, and it is therefore necessary to define the term diplomacy.

A relatively comprehensive definition of ‘diplomacy’ is as follows:

'...The conduct of relationships, using peaceful means, by and among international actors, at least one of whom is usually governmental' (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013, p. 2).

Peaceful activities or means are viewed as the primary characteristic of diplomacy, although 'it may occur within war or armed conflict or be used in the orchestration of particular acts of violence, such as seeking overflight clearance for an airstrike' (Barson, 2006, p. 1).

In the past few decades, mainly with the global rise of democratic politics, multiple governance and information technology, the sphere of diplomacy has experienced a shift from club politics to network coordination. 'Bilateral state-to-state diplomacy remains an important structural feature... but it has been increasingly supplemented by multilateral forms of diplomacy with a mixture of state and non-state actors involved' (White, 2005, p. 400). Figure 2.1 extracted from Heine (2006, p. 15) reflects the changing nature of 21st century diplomacy.

<i>Levels</i>	Local, Domestic, National, Bilateral, Regional, Global
<i>Scope</i>	Broad array of public policy issues
<i>Actors</i>	Governments, Private Firms, Multi-National Companies, Civil Society Actors
<i>Machinery</i>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of International Trade, Department of Defence
<i>Modes</i>	Summits, Shuttle, Track Two, Celebrity

Figure 2.1: The Complex Network of Modern Diplomacy

2.3 Does Culture Influence Diplomacy?

Does culture influence diplomacy? This is not a question with a clear answer. Although to many the answer is a resounding *yes*, there are still some who deny this or are sceptical of it.

Deniers always claim that ‘most political, social and cultural life is lived inside polities, between which only simple relations are conducted in a thin or absent cultural context’ (Sharp, 2004, p. 362). Such an argument is obviously contrary to human feelings, and in real life there is never a boundary separating culture and polity (in a sense, polity itself is a form of culture).

Admitting that culture does play a role in diplomacy, sceptics still emphasise that ‘individual human beings may have uneven and limited liability commitments to the cultures of the societies in which they live’ (Ibid.). There are always examples of leaders ‘who did try very hard to view the world from different perspectives’ (Breuning, 2007, p. 54) and who ‘asked themselves hard questions about the accuracy and wisdom of their own beliefs and judgments’ (Welch, 2003, p. 208). This implies that from the perspective of the feasibility of a study, culture is not a reliable or valuable variable to explore political behaviours. These doubts in fact are entrenched in a kind of absolute individualism and obscure the real explanations for why a set of people seem to think, act and believe in a certain way. Many cultural theories have revealed that ‘in any given situation, an individual selects a dominant cultural identity trait, which plays a primary role in influencing his or her behaviour’ (Singer, 1998, p. xiii).

This study is clearly based on the premise that culture must and can affect diplomacy.

Arguments to support this can be summarised as follows:

- Culture is a ubiquitous factor in diplomacy.
 - Influences individual and group.
 - Exists in social interaction.
 - Exists in language.
- Culture is a kind of diplomatic resource.
 - To enhance diplomatic activities
 - To gain domestic support

The following sections will elaborate on the above arguments.

2.3.1 Culture as a ubiquitous factor

Individual and group.

Why can culture influence diplomacy? The predominant cause must be the fact that culture influences—or, more accurately, is embedded in—every individual and group in human society.

Numerous studies have been conducted to explain the relationship between culture and human behaviour.¹³ A classic argument often cited is as follows:

¹³ See, for example, Harrison, L. E., & Huntington, S. P. (2000). *Culture matters: How values shape human progress*. New York:

The pattern of culture conditions individuals, providing their assumptions and their tools of observation and thought, and setting the frame for their living. It determines the forms of institutions, the types of personality which will be developed, and the types of conduct which will be sanctioned. (Ware, 1940, p. 11)

At the individual level, no one can be totally culturally independent, and no political career can be conducted in the absence of a cultural context. Decision-makers and diplomatic participants are 'products as well as representatives of their society' (Breuning, 2007, p. 117). Through a long-lasting socialisation process, it is highly possible that their cultural awareness is related to their understanding of international affairs and cannot be abandoned or erased even by means of intense professional training (Bolewski, 2008, pp. 149-151). Besides, in many cases, diplomats may not necessarily be conscious of the cultural foundation of their conduct but will still follow cultural common sense, which Roland Barthes described as 'what-goes-without-saying' (Barthes, 1972, p. 11). Although cultural differences always lead to obstacles in communication, abandoning a national culture of individuality in diplomacy seems to do more harm than good, as diplomats 'would not be able to identify with their own cultural background, making it almost impossible to fulfil their job as servants of national interests' (Bolewski, 2008, p. 151).

At the group level, culture contributes to the institutional framework that comprises formal

Basic Books; Reis, H. T., Collins, W. A., & Berscheid, E. (2000). The relationship context of human behavior and development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(6), 844-872; Nisbett, R. E., & Miyamoto, Y. (2005). The influence of culture: Holistic versus analytic perception. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(10), 467-473; Oyserman, D., & Lee, S. W. (2008). Does culture influence what and how we think? Effects of priming individualism and collectivism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 311-342.

and informal rules (Breuning, 1999, pp. 103-104). When rooted in a specific culture, formal rules help draw clear parameter within which policy makers can take decisions more easily, while informal rules will have an on-going influence on behavioural styles and habits. If a country has been accustomed to one set of established cultural rules, it will find it difficult to adapt to a different one. Consider China as an example. For centuries, China had adopted a Sino-centric model in its dealings with others—a model that was highly assimilative, hierarchical, ideological and personalistic. From the 19th century, when China had to adapt to the European multistage system, which is egalitarian, non-ideological and contractual, it faced cultural confusion and behavioural issues and was also revealed as having an inherent, long-standing sense of unwillingness.¹⁴

Social interaction.

One of the core functions of culture is to ascribe meaning to humans' social interactions (Matsumoto 2007, p. 1295). For social actors, culture principally explains two key things: '(1) the relationship between the individual and the group and (2) the establishment and maintenance of hierarchies'(Ibid., pp. 1296-8).¹⁵ According to this logic presented by Matsumoto, culture can be considered a guideline for the smooth operation of diplomacy,

¹⁴ See also, Nathan, A. J., & Scobell, A. (2015). *China's search for security*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹⁵ With regard to the first point, 'all human societies make distinctions between ingroups and outgroups' (Matsumoto, 2007, p. 1296), and 'self-ingroup relationships are inherently different from self-outgroup relationships' (Ibid, p. 1297). With regard to the second point, 'all groups require some degree of hierarchy in order to function effectively' (Ibid.). See also, Matsumoto, D. (2007). Culture, context, and behavior. *Journal of Personality*, 75(6), 1285-1320.

providing participants with information or analytical frameworks for social roles, the structures of international systems, diplomatic etiquette and so on.

Countries—especially those that have or seek a dominant position in the international arena—tend to impose their own interactional models on other countries whose cultures are very different (Bolewski, 2008, p. 146). This study shows how, under the influence of face culture, China thinks about its relationships with other actors and how it promotes its preferred hierarchical models in the conduct of its diplomacy.

Language.

Language is the medium through which culture penetrates the diplomatic process.

The relationship between culture and language can be summarised as follows: 'Language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality' (Kramsch, 1998, pp. 3-4). Linguists regard language as 'a key to the cultural past of a society' and 'a guide to social reality' (Slazmann, 1998, p. 41). Meanwhile, according to Nick (2001, p. 39), language is not only a simple tool but 'often the very essence of the diplomatic vocation'. 'The process of diplomacy—communicating, negotiating, reaching and formulating agreements, collecting, creating, transmitting and recording knowledge—all depends on language' (Sharp, 2001, pp. 93-106). Its function can be described as 'political technology' meant to help achieve certain interests (Laffy & Weldes, 1997), a form of 'rhetorical coercion' (Kreb & Jackson, 2007) or a 'representational force' (Mattern, 2001) to eliminate unfavourable outcomes, as well as a means of 'selling

policies' to the foreign and domestic public (Jackson, 2011, p. 391).

Language is also commonly recognised as an obstacle to a successful diplomatic process because of the 'possible cross-cultural misinterpretations' (Bolewski, 2008, p. 152). 'Even if the negotiating partners use the same language, it can be difficult or even impossible to communicate the meaning and relevance of a certain word. Some words have a completely different meaning depending on the origin of the culture in which they are used' (Ibid., p. 153). Because of such problems, some have even suggested the creation of a cosmopolitan language specifically for diplomacy, which is not related to any specific culture and can therefore serve as a quasi-neutral medium of exchange (Jaber, 2001, p. 51).

2.3.2 Culture as a diplomatic resource

It is common for leaders and diplomats to draw upon the 'toolbox' of cultural resources as an interpretive framework for problem definition and solution (Jackson, 2011, p. 391).

To enhance diplomatic activities.

Culture, as an important soft power asset, 'contributes to a more effective environment for diplomacy and foreign relations' (Reiterer, 2014, p. 139). The common cultural tools of diplomacy include the arts, exhibitions, exchanges, educational programmes, literature, language teaching, broadcasting, gifts, listening and according respect, promoting ideas and social policy, religion, communication and so on (Lenczowski, 2008, pp. 13-19). In the short term, culture may bring about many interests; in the long term, culture can significantly

ameliorate international relations by 'bringing to light and strengthening cultural affinities and thereby inspiring relations of trust' (Ibid., p. 19).

As early as the time of the Cold War, both Soviet and American policymakers 'realized that to "win the minds of men" in Europe and to convince people of the "right" ideology, they had to appeal more to their cultural identity than to their political identity' (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried, 2010, p. 15). Both superpowers employed lasting cultural infiltration and psychological warfare to dwarf their opponents and improve their relations with their client states. The recently emerging cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy are all aimed at making good use of a country's cultural resources to build relationships among different nations. For example, the EU clearly claims that 'Europe's cultural richness and diversity is closely linked to its role and influence in the world' (European Commission, 2007). On the issue of EU-China relations, it is believed that 'developing through culture, the EU soft power projection capacities in China can strengthen the EU's image while promoting the diversity of its cultures and its shared values and improve mutual understanding, which can be further useful in political dialogue and trade relationships' (Reiterer, 2014, p. 145).

To gain domestic support.

A country's diplomats 'must not only respond appropriately to the situation, they must also be acceptable at home' (Breuning, 2007, p. 116). Most of the time, culture (especially the national and/or traditional culture of a state) is a framework used to legitimise policies to the collective.

The political elites that can justify itself in cultural terms can become stronger and gain the approval of the domestic public more easily (Sharp, 2004, p. 363).

For example, when explaining the War on Terror, the Bush administration always infused its official discourse with terms like ‘...with long-standing and widely accepted cultural notions of “American exceptionalism”, “manifest destiny” and the “chosen nation”’ (Hughes, 2003). ‘Expressed in terms of this pre-existing cultural grammar, the narratives of the war on terror come to be accepted as self-evident truths and common sense’ (Jackson, 2011, pp. 398-9). Similarly, modern-day Chinese leaders like to quote Confucius when explaining foreign policies, in order to demonstrate their adherence to traditional Chinese ethics.

2.4 Different Answers: How Does Culture Influence Diplomacy?

How culture influences diplomacy is the core question behind most cultural analyses of diplomacy. Any research on this subject should fulfil the following two basic conditions: ‘(1) Culture must be (re)conceptualized so as to facilitate rigorous empirical research, and (2) the conceptual distance between the independent variable must be reduced’ (Zurovchak, 1997, p. 125). Based on these, different theoretical approaches, one must try to seek suitable and, at best, observable symbols to reveal the concrete influences of culture.

Strategic culture research, which can be traced back to the 1970s, attempts to create framework to examine the impact of culture on a state’s diplomacy, especially its external security policies. According to leading scholar Ian Johnston (1995, p. 46), ‘strategic culture is an

integrated system of symbols (e.g. argumentation, structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious'. Klein (1988, p. 136) emphasises that this research model establishes 'widely available orientations to violence and to ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies'.

An inheritance from the tradition of **liberal institutionalism**, scholars of this school of thought underline the role of the institution in cultural analysis. Sackmann (1991) defines culture in organisations as the social construction of rules that guide collective perception and thought. Also, institutional structures can reflect the conditions and power configurations of a particular time, become vehicles of value transmission and shape the decision-making process (Koelble, 1995; March & Olsen, 1984). Goldstein and Keohane presented a theoretical construct in their book *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change*. They used the term *idea* instead of *culture*, but, nevertheless, the following cultural analysis is based on the analytical structure they presented. Ideas are divided into three types: world views, principled beliefs and causal beliefs. Next, they put forward three causal pathways through which ideas can affect foreign policy: 'By providing principled or causal maps, affecting strategies where there is no unique equilibrium, and becoming embedded in institutions' (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p. 8). Among these three pathways, 'ideas embedded in institutions specify policy in the absence of innovation' (Ibid., p. 13). They can 'affect the incentives of political entrepreneurs long after the

interests of its initial proponents have changed' (Ibid.).

Historical sociology attracts scholars of international relations who are motivated by the belief that 'the distinctive and possibly unique features of the modern world will remain opaque unless they are placed in the broadest historical context' (Linklater, 2009, p. 136). This school of thought tends to view culture from a macroscopic perspective, as a 'normative structure' within which interactions between political communities take place (Ibid., p. 149). Perhaps the most influential study on this subject is Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' theory, which has heavily influenced academic agendas and provoked a lot of new research since its publication. Huntington (1993) predicted that violence resulting from international anarchy and the absence of common values and institutions would erupt among and between civilisations rather than among and between states.

Constructivism according to Houghton (2007, p. 25) can help revive the field of diplomacy research, as it 'has a significant bearing particularly upon the cognitive psychological approach to the study of foreign policy'. Broadly speaking, constructivism has appeared in two major schools—North American and European. The former emphasises the role of 'common knowledge', 'social norms' and 'identity' in constructing international relations and determining diplomatic outcomes; the latter pays attention largely to the role of 'language', 'linguistic constructions' and 'social discourses' in defining situations, revealing motives and setting forth strategies (Behraves, 2011; Banerjee, 1997, p. 29). Both contribute greatly to the development of cultural analysis, and the most influential variant is perhaps Wendt's theory of social constructivism. Wendt regards culture in international politics as common and collective

knowledge, which is 'deeply embedded in how both statesman and scholars understand the nature of international politics' (1999, p. 190). According to him, the social structure of international politics known as 'culture' has construction effects on states, most directly on their identities and interests and then on their behaviours (1999, pp. 246-251). Although Wendt has repeatedly claimed that his theory is systemic rather than at the agent or foreign policy level, this has not prevented many scholars from adopting constructivist approaches and frameworks in the analysis of state diplomacy.

Political psychology 'occupies an uncertain space in the study of international politics and foreign policy' (Levy, 2013, p. 1). Many theorists define culture in cognitive terms, mainly due to the proposition that culture encourages and sustains certain kinds of cognitive ideas and processes, which then shape the content and structure of the decision-making process (Nisbett & Norenzayan, 2002). Although for a state there are very real differences between small groups, organisations and societies, among each of them, culture is always present in the form of 'shared cognitive mechanisms' (Breuning, 1997, p. 101). It is claimed that 'the incorporation of psychological variables and their interaction effects into social and cultural explanations of identity would create a better balance between social structures and individual agency in constructivist research' (Levy, 2013, p. 24).

Role theory, which this research will mainly rely on, is another important theory in the context of cultural research. The following chapter will present a further theoretical discussion on this subject. Obviously, the scope of these theories is not entirely clear, and individual studies will often combine elements from each approach.

Research paradigm	Level of analysis	Definition of culture	Theoretical argument
<i>Strategic culture research</i>	State	An integrated system of symbols	Strategic culture → Strategic preference → Diplomacy
<i>Liberal institutionalism</i>	State; System	Institutional structure constructed by rules	Culture → Institutional structure → Diplomacy
<i>Historical sociology</i>	System	Normative structure	Culture → Normative structure → Diplomacy
<i>Constructivism (North American variant)</i>	State; System	Common knowledge; Social norms	Culture (Social structure) → Identity and interest of actor → Diplomacy
<i>Constructivism (Europe variant)</i>	State; System	Social discourses	Culture (Discourse structure) → Identity and interest of actor → Diplomacy
<i>Political psychology</i>	Individual; State	Shared cognitive mechanism	Culture → Cognitive content and progress → Diplomacy
<i>Role theory</i>	Individual; State; System	Ego aspects from the state's history that do, or have, shaped identity	Culture → National role conception → Diplomacy

Figure 2.2: Various interpretations of cultural Influence on diplomacy.

2.5 Theoretical Framework Based on Role Theory

Role theory, which initially developed in sociology and psychology to map human activity, is a suitable theoretical tool that infuses culture with more analytical power and avoids nebulous, catchall explanations. Specifically in the context of research on Chinese diplomacy, according to Gottwald and Duggan (2011, p. 238), the role theory approach ‘opens up the domestic dimension by incorporating the expectations of the domestic constituency’ and, finally, ‘allows for ideas, notions of historical traditions, and interests to be integrated through the self-perception of the Chinese leadership regarding its role in foreign policy’.

2.5.1 Basic concepts

Role

Just like the concept of *culture*, the term *role* appears throughout academic literature on social science, but it has never had a universally accepted definition. American sociologist Bruce Biddle (1979, p. 58) defines *role* as ‘those behaviors characteristic of one or more persons in a context’ and presents a relatively comprehensive summary of its essential features (Ibid.):

1. Roles are behavioural and must involve overt actions or performances that can be observed by persons.

2. Roles are performed by persons, which is confined to the behaviours of human beings.
3. Roles are normally limited in some way by contextual specification.
4. Roles consist of those behaviours that are characteristic of a set of persons and a context.

It should be noted that *role* may be exhibited by one person and also may be assumed by several persons or a social group (Ibid., p. 60). Consequently, it is plausible to use this concept to describe the regular behavioural pattern of a state. In addition, theorists tend to believe that roles are not solely pre-existing but are contained in the entire process of becoming (Butler, 2011). Fazendeiro (2016, p. 11) noted that 'it is not simply by being called a woman that one becomes a woman, but rather by systematically corroborating that role with a particular set of actions'.

Role conception

Role conception is a highly contested concept. The definition presented by Holisti (1970), who first introduced role theory in the context of the research behaviour of a state, is still the most classic reference:

The policymakers' own definition of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules, and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state

should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their 'image' of the appropriate orientation or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment. (Holsti, 1970, pp. 245-6)

This definition dominated early research on role theory (e.g. Holsti, 1970; Walker, 1979, 1987; Wish, 1980), but it is now believed to only focus on the ego aspect of roles, namely, the "self-conceptualization of a state's purpose by its leadership" (Harnisch, 2011, p. 7). Drawing on the work of social constructivists and discourse theorists (e.g. Mead, 1970; Wendt, 1987), current research views role conception in a more integrative sense. A typical definition from Sebastian Harnisch (2011, p. 8) is as follows: 'An actor's perception of his or her position vis-à-vis others (the ego part of a role) and the perception of the role expectations of others (the alter part of a role) as signaled through language and actions.'

This definition reflects the general truth that 'roles and their enactment are closely related to the roles of other actors' (Ibid.). In different situations, the ego part and the alter part both have the possibility to become dominant factors in role conception. For example, according to Maull (2011, pp. 170-1), US foreign policy role conceptions from 2000 to 2010 reflects a dominance of ego expectation and perception, namely, the pursuit of an exclusive global leadership role based on the 'American ideology'. The alter parts were simply subordinate to this, if considered at all. Another example is that China substantially altered its role from being a stubborn obstructionist to an active peacekeeping force over the course of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur (Gottwald & Duggan, 2011, p. 240; Huang, 2008, pp. 1-2) The main reason for this was that Beijing's role conception is heavily modified on the basis of the expectations of significant

others, most notably the African Union and then the United States (Gottwald & Duggan, 2011 p. 242; Harnisch, 2012, p. 64). From this case, it can be seen that the alter part of role conception appears to be more decisive than the ego part.

This research also accepts Holsti's emphasis on the crucial role of decision makers as primary bearers of national role conceptions.¹⁶ In most cases individuals who serve as decision-makers are 'the only ones we can confidently assume could speak with authority on matters of foreign and defense policy' (Chafetz, Abramso, & Grillot, 1996, p. 741). On the one hand, 'every foreign policy decision maker is as much a member of the social cognitive structure that characterizes his/her society as the average citizen' (Hopf, 2002, p. 37). A nation's leader could represent his/her state 'in part because they articulate a vision of the nation's role in the world affairs that corresponds to deep, cultural beliefs about the nation' (Hudson, 1999, p. 769). On the other hand, more often than not, decision-makers have the predominant power or autonomy of translating their preferred ideational elements into role conceptions (cf. Breuning, 1997; Hobolt, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2005), and eventually make their actions look like a homogenous response to their domestic audiences.¹⁷

Why does this study choose to focus on role theory? The main reason is that role conception is

¹⁶ Some scholars believe that decision makers who can affect national role conceptions include not only heads of government and foreign policy ministers but also cabinet members and members of the state legislature (Brummer & Thies, 2015, p. 290; Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012 p. 275).

¹⁷ Some empirical studies have shown that the public or citizens in fact rely more on 'cognitive shortcuts' in a complex decision-making environment (Cram & Patrikios, 2015, p. 188) and are not adept at shaping and adjusting national identities. More often, they just follow what the decision-makers believe (Hudson, 1999). Given the centralised structure of the Chinese political system, Chinese decision-makers evidently have more of a monopoly on shaping China's national role conceptions.

assumed to be a stable determinant, which can provide long-standing guidelines or standards of appropriate behaviour for policymakers (Biddle, 1986, p. 148; Breuning, 2011, p. 7). Krotz and Sperling (2011, pp. 213-251) probe the American and French role conceptions from the Cold War to the 21st century¹⁸ and conclude that a role conception can 'both exist and persist fairly isolated from even dramatic external political changes or fundamental shifts in the international system'. For researchers, this longevity and stability of role conception are assets when attempting to explain the long-term patterns of behaviour rather than discrete decisions (Harnisch, 2011, p. 7). Nevertheless, almost all of the theorists accept that role conception is 'not something an agent merely inherits' (Schlag, 2009, p. 98), but in fact it regularly has a certain degree of malleability and more often undergoes a gradual shift or modification (Aggestam, 2006, p. 22; Muller, 2011, p. 56).

In this study, *identity* and *role conception* are believed to be synonymous and the terms are used interchangeably.

Role performance

Role performance, basically identified as a dependent variable in research, refers to 'the *behavior* of an actor when performing a role' (Harnisch, 2011, p. 9). For an international actor,

¹⁸ According to Krotz and Sperling's research, both the United States and France have had some consistent or unrelenting national role conception since the 1950s. For example, the United States always views itself as a benevolent hegemon that deserves the obedience of its European and Asian allies, and France views itself as a great power capable of challenging and balancing the American hegemon and leading an autonomous Europe (Krotz & Sperling, 2011, p. 214).

common performances include speech, various diplomatic actions as well as non-action¹⁹ (Harnisch, 2011, p. 15; Holsti, 1970, p. 247).

As a rule, role theory assumes that the role conception and role performance it engenders are consistent (Folz, 2011, p. 148; Frank, 2011, p. 132). According to role theorists, role conceptions determine foreign policy behaviour because they constitute a national understanding of the external environment (Krotz & Sperling, 2011, p. 214); they imply specific expectations of state actions (Frank, 2011, p. 132; Hopf, 1998); they have been internalised and habitualised to such a degree that they are considered appropriate behaviour in the international arena (Benes, 2011, p. 5; Muller, 2011, p. 57).

Also noteworthy is that, in real life, there is indeed no one-to-one correspondence between role conception and role performance. Concretely, 'the role prescribes behaviors, values and objectives in a general frame, but the individual representative is given some leeway—occasionally considerable leeway—to enact the role in ways fit for the particular environment in which she has to operate' (Muller, 2011, p. 56).

Role conflict

The state or a decision-maker tends to simultaneously hold incompatible national role conceptions. It is not surprising that the correlation of role conceptions and role enactment

¹⁹ Non-action refers to the deliberate absence of action. In international relations, non-interference in others' internal affairs, wilful ignorance of external criticism or refusal to shake hands by officials of allied nations all can be regarded as examples of non-action.

behaviours usually takes on a disaggregated form (Shih, 1988, p. 601; Walker, 1979, p. 204). According to Biddle (1986, p. 83), role conflict can 'derive from *role ambiguity* (when the specificity of a norm is low), *role malintegration* (when multiple roles do not interlock), *role discontinuity* (when different sequential contexts require disjointed roles), and *role overload* (when too many role expectations exist)'. Generally, role conflict can 'take the form of either interrole or intrarole conflict' (Brummer & Thies, 2015, p. 279). Inter-role conflict refers to 'an actor occupying two or more roles simultaneously that have incompatible expectations'; intra-role conflict involves 'incompatible expectations held either by the actor or others regarding a single role' (Ibid.).

It is not a problem for social actors to occupy conflicting roles in a social system at any given time, 'since multiple roles may be organized so that they are successfully enacted successively or simultaneously' (Thies, 2012, p. 29). For example, although some scholars (Deng, 2008; Geeraerts, 2013b; S. Li, 2012) claim that China's diplomacy often faces difficulties due to its double role conceptions i.e. a 'weak power identity' and a 'great power identity', this study will try to prove that such double identities are in fact intentional and are based on cultural heritage as well as realistic considerations.

One purpose of this research is to consider some of China's contradictory roles in the context of international relations and to prove that face culture is a significant cause of China's role conflicts.

2.5.2 Theoretical framework: Between culture and role performance

Sources of role conceptions

Generally, role theorists in social science focus on agent-level variables, namely, 'the individual interpretations and definitions of rights, duties, privileges and appropriate forms of behavior' (Flockhart, 2011), and in a profound sense, 'agents' desire to maximize their own self-esteem' (Ibid., p. :99).

In the field of international relations, there have long been two strands of research differing with regard to the sources of role conception. One tends to believe that an international actor's role conceptions are mainly driven by internal ideas and processes, namely, domestic-level elements. Benes (2011, p. 13) argues that the theoretical meaning of role theory is to correct the constructivist dismissal of agency in favour of structure. For Hopf (2002, p. 263), role conceptions can even be entirely domestically driven, and 'there is no justification for assuming that the identity of a state can be constructed only vis-à-vis another state'. The other theory holds an explicitly system-dominant perspective, focusing on foreign decision makers' perceptions of their state's position in the international environment. This research trend is mainly a product of the constructivist argument that roles are institutionalised in social structures (Wendt, 1999, p. 227) and 'the intersubjective structure is the final arbiter of meaning' (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). In light of this deep divergence, role theorists always have conflicting viewpoints about the same issue. For example, Holsti (1970, p. 243) favours domestic sources of role conceptions, believing that during serious international conflicts, self-

defined national role conceptions always take precedence over externally derived role prescriptions. However, Breuing (2011, p. 20) notes that ‘crisis situations are likely to narrow the scope of agency and may lead actors to perceive themselves as merely reacting to a structural imperative’.

In its contemporary formulation, ‘role theory occupies a middle position on the ontological spectrum between individualism and structuralism’ (Benes, 2011, p. 8). Theorists have proposed multiple sources of national role conceptions, trying to accommodate both structural and agent-based factors, as well as material and ideational factors.

	Material	Ideational
Domestic level	Decision-makers’ perception of a state’s · Power and capability · Tangible national interests	Decision-makers’ perception of a state’s · Cultural heritage · Historical memory · Public opinion · Leader’s individual preferences
International level	Decision-makers’ perception of a state’s · Power status in the global order or specific area · Opportunity to act (possibilities afforded by	Decision-makers’ perception of · Universal values or commonly accepted norms · Socialization from some actor or among actors

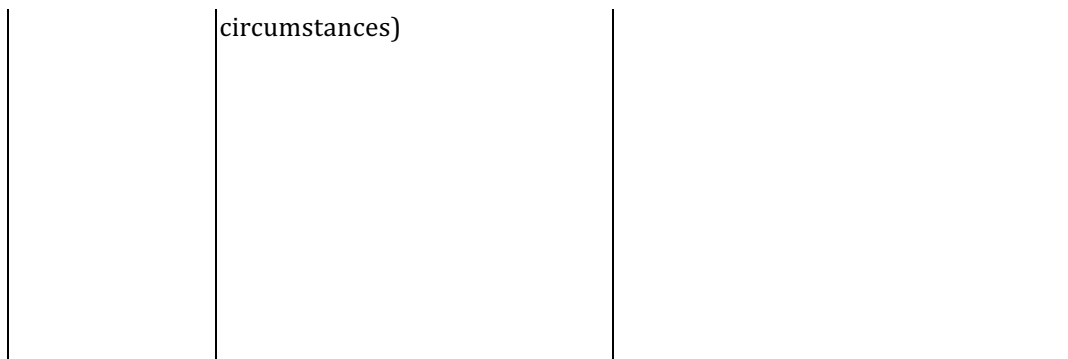


Figure 2.3: Multiple sources of national role conceptions.

(c.f. Breuning, 2011, p. 26; Neack, 1995)

‘The relative significance of domestic and international sources is ultimately a matter for empirical research’ (Breuning, 2011, p. 19). Most researchers feel no necessity to determine one final answer to this agent-structure problem, and which source provides better explanations for state behaviour depends on specified sets of circumstances.

Culture, role conception, role performance

According to role theory, there is a three-part relationship between culture and a state’s diplomatic behaviour. Role conception is regarded as an intermediate variable between these two factors.



Figure 2.4 Theoretical framework of culture and diplomatic behaviour

First, a state's cultural heritage constitutes the main and stable source of its national role conception. Culture is regarded as the main domestic source of national role conception (Breuning, 1997; Chafetz et al., 1996; Hudson, 1999), and it is identified as a 'hard' core of the multiplicity of roles that can give the actor some distinctive individuality (Muller, 2011, p. 56). Hudson (1999, p. 770) argues that deep-rooted cultural differences reverberate through many national role conceptions and behaviours. In this sense, roles are essentially 'social positions', 'comprised of cultural norms that engender certain expectations of appropriate behaviour' (Nabers, 2011, p. 75).

Second, role conception leads to corresponding role performances. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, role conceptions are first internalised by the decision-maker and then become the standard of appropriate behaviour that prescribes a particular behaviour in certain situations (Folz, 2011, p. 148; Hudson, 1999, pp. 767-801). In this sense, roles are 'shared, normative expectations that prescribe and proscribe behavior' (Nabers, 2011, p. 75).

This study aims to further explore to what degree and how face culture as a source of role conception is translated into China's national images and diplomatic performances. The concrete application of this framework will be illustrated in the next chapter following a discussion on face culture. This study will adopt inductive reasoning, using concrete cases and detailed empirical proof to testify to the salience of face culture.

2.6 A Cultural Study of Diplomacy: The Case of China

Period	Research topic	Dominant theory	Dominant method
Starting-Marxism Period (1950s-1970s)	Diplomacy of the Communist Group; International conflicts between American and Soviet camps	Class analysis of Marxism-Leninism; Mao's Theory of Contradiction	Descriptive analysis
Learning-Copying Period (1980s-1990s)	China's integration into the world economic and political system; Multi-polarisation and major power relations; Introduction of American theories	American theories of international relations, especially realism and liberal institutionalism	Qualitative study; Standard analysis; Literature review
Reflecting-Constructing Period (2000s-Present)	China's rise; China's diverse roles; Major power relations; Regional integration and multilateral governance; Low-political issues; A possible Chinese theory of international relations	Western theories of international relations, including American theories, the English School, the Copenhagen School, Japanese theories etc.	Qualitative study; Quantitative study; Historical methods; Discourse analysis

*Figure 2.5: Development stages of studies on China's international relations.*²⁰

As a researcher from China, my research motivation behind this paper is closely linked with current studies on China's international relations. It is therefore imperative to provide an overview of the contemporary features of this field of research.

Figure 2.5 presents a brief history of Chinese studies in the field of international relations. After the foundation of the PRC, in light of research topics and preferences, these studies can be divided into the three stages outlined above. Currently, although Chinese scholars still have a long way to go to catch up with their Western counterparts, they have essentially grasped Western research theories and models and moved on from the pure 'imitation' stage to the 'reflecting-constructing' stage. Moreover, the entire community has gradually developed a sense of academic self-consciousness. 'Nearly all Chinese scholars agree that Western IR theory cannot solve all Chinese problems and puzzles—that the Chinese should have their own theories to explain the world, especially to theorize Chinese diplomatic practice' (Wang, 2009,

²⁰ This chart has been compiled with reference to the following studies: Wang, Y. (2009). China: Between copying and constructing. In A. B. Tickner, & O. Waver (Eds.) *International Relations Scholarship Around the World* (pp. 103-119). Oxon and New York: Routledge; Qin, Y. (2005). A Chinese school of international relations theory: Possibility and inevitability. *World Economics and Politics*, 3, 7(13); Duan, X. (2008). Review of China's international relations research since The Reform and Opening-Up of 1978. *Contemporary International Relations*, 12, 50-54.

p. 107).

Many Chinese scholars are seeking to establish theoretical models or explain issues from the perspective of indigenous Chinese culture and practice. Most of them do not seem to be doubtful of the research value of Chinese culture to international studies. Some studies underline geo-cultural uniqueness. Qin Yaqing (2005, p. 9), for instance, believes that a Chinese School of International Relations theory is very possible, first because social theory differs from natural theory in that the former has a distinct geo-cultural birthmark. Also, for China, the main cultural resources include 'the all-under-heaven worldview and the practice of the tributary system, the revolutionary thoughts and practices in China, and the ideas and practice of Reform and Opening-up since 1978' (Ibid.). On the other hand, some highlight cultural continuity. Shi Yinhong (2010, p. 23) states that China's huge size, long history and rich culture determine that over hundreds of years, the Chinese have never liked to identify themselves as followers of any foreign civilisation or culture. 'People are easily shocked or occupied by the radical changes of the modern or contemporary China, but meanwhile they still inherit some profound cultural or behavioral characteristics owned by China' (Ibid., p. 15). Some emphasise the potential of influence. Yan Xuetong (2011) posits that Chinese traditional thought has a greater chance than any other foreign ideology (say, Marxism or Liberalism) of becoming the dominant intellectual force behind Chinese diplomacy-making. Wang Jisi (2011, p. 504) notes that Chinese native culture can serve as a unifying and energising force, since 'the pursuit of centralized single party rule in a country with a vast diversity of conflicting interests reinforces the need for exhortatory implements of rule'. Certainly, there are also sceptical voices in the context of

cultural study. Zhang Jianxin (2009, p. 13) opposes the overemphasis of China’s ancient political culture, which often mingles with ethical ideas and lacks a realistic discussion about politics. Shi Yinhong (2010, p. 17) who emphasises the importance of culture also questions the necessity of establishing native Chinese international theories.

Over the past few years, Chinese scholars have done considerable work on the cultural research of international relations, but through analysing the available statistics and a literature review, the author finds that the status of this research is barely satisfactory.

	Culture-related theory	Cultural analysis of contemporary China’s diplomacy	Cultural analysis of other countries’ diplomacy	China’s ancient diplomatic or strategic culture
<i>World Economy and Politics</i>	4	5	17	20
<i>The Chinese Journal of International Politics</i>	6	7	4	14
<i>Contemporary International Relations</i>	2	10	24	4
<i>Diplomatic</i>	14	25	23	5

<i>Review</i>				
<i>International Politics Quarterly</i>	12	3	12	10
<i>World Outlook</i>	4	8	10	13
Total	42	58	90	66
Percentage	16.40%	22.60%	35.20%	25.80%

Figure 2.6: Cultural research on international relations in China's top academic journals:²¹

Four types of articles (2010-2014)

The numbers in Figure 2.6 show that cultural research today focuses more on other countries' diplomacy and ancient China's external relations. The former is basically concentrated on the United States and Japan, mainly elaborating on cultural factors behind their 'aggressive' or

²¹ Data Sources: www.cnki.net (The China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database official website). *World Economy and Politics* is a journal published by the Institute of World Economy and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Science. In China's academic circles, it is commonly regarded as the leading academic journal in the field of international relations. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* is a journal published by the Institute of Modern International Relations, Tsinghua University. *Contemporary International Relations* is a journal published by the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations that is affiliated with China's State Security Ministry. *Diplomatic Review* is a journal published by China Foreign Affairs University under China's Foreign Affairs Ministry. *International Politics Quarterly* is a journal of the School of International Studies, Peking University. *World Outlook* is a journal published by the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, affiliated with Shanghai's government.

'unfriendly' foreign policies towards China or the world. The latter looks more like a study of ideological history, whose aim is nothing but to show the uniqueness of China's thoughts and behaviours. Very often, Chinese traditional culture is presented as a treasure trove of soft power; China's worldviews are illustrated as 'the idealized view of Chinese civilization as open to the world, and tolerant of outsiders' (Callahan, 2012, p. 20).

The analysis of China's contemporary diplomacy only accounts for a small proportion of the research and gets short shrift. Many essays are just limited to analysing China's burgeoning cultural or public diplomacy in which culture is originally the main tool or content of policy. Chinese scholars seem uninterested in using culture to explain diplomatic practices in the political, military and other spheres of high politics. The cultural analysis is not well integrated with current diplomacy, so to speak.

Another significant problem is that to ensure 'political correctness', Chinese academic research, especially in the field of social science, more often than not must cater to the government or the ruling party's viewpoints or preferences. For example, 'in Chinese academic society, criticizing or underestimating the United States is always politically right' (Niu, 2014, p. 9). This is a common practice whose purpose is to elude the possible risks of political speech (Ibid.). Similarly, in cultural research, Chinese researchers habitually attribute the characteristics of China's diplomacy to concepts promoted by its highest rung of leaders. Consider the term 'Harmonious World' as an example.²² This term appeared most frequently in Chinese studies on

²² On 15 September 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao called for a 'harmonious world' at the summit for the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations (UN). At the end of this year, the PRC State Council Information Office issued a white

international relations during the period of the former President Hu Jintao. There was considerable research to argue its 'guiding' or 'positive' influence on China's foreign policy, although most of it lacked any clear logic or empirical evidence. When President Xi Jinping came to power, the concept of Harmonious World seemed to become a founding overnight, and the new idea dubbed 'China Dream, World Dream'²³ began to heavily feature in Chinese academic discourse and research.

It is such things that inspired my research interest in this topic. First, it is a pressing need to analyse what is happening in China today and to explore the longevity of the rules behind it, instead of focusing on China's historical glory or past thinkers' (or politicians') thoughts. Professor Di Xuewei's comment on social science in China today captures my feelings: 'So many highly realistic problems or issues do not gain the deserved attention or enough discussion, and so many clarified things have very little to do with China today' (Di, 2013, p. 3).

Second, my research has been driven by the desire to reveal an authentic China from the cultural perspective. 'Romanticizing and demonizing China... dangerously distorts our understanding of Chinese foreign policies' (Gries, 2005, p. 20). In recent years, plenty of Western scholars have become fond of embellishing their descriptions of an aggressive and

paper entitled *China's peaceful development road*, which referred to building a harmonious world as one of China's 'lofty goal[s]' in taking the 'road of peaceful development'. The concept of 'harmonious world' since became the most mentioned term in Hu Jintao's diplomacy. From the perspective of Western scholars, although this idea has received considerable attention in China, the concept always remains ill defined and very much dependent on the interpretations of its advocates.

²³ 'China Dream' [Chinese: 中国梦] is a political term that gained popularity in China after President Xi Jinping took office. Generally, this phrase refers to the collective hope of Chinese people to restore China's lost national greatness.

threatening China and believe that this crafty country is enthusiastic about taking off its disguise and revealing its Machiavellian side. On the contrary, many Chinese scholars have strived to relentlessly prove that China is and will continue to be a peaceful force and claim that the world will soon witness it becoming a world leader that is totally different from its previous hegemonic form. This research will try to avoid the paradigm of 'either-or' thinking and provide more plausible descriptions of a multifaceted China.

Chapter 3

Face Culture in Chinese Society

忍丑少羞，无面有头。

—《诗经》

If a person can endure the sloppy appearance and lack of sense of shame, he only has his head rather than face.

—*Classic of Poetry*²⁴

Over the decades, social scientists from various fields have explored the concept of face, which is believed to help account for much of the distinctive yet misunderstood individual/organisational behaviour seen in Chinese social life (Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 523).

For most Chinese people, the word 面子 [*face*] seems to be a natural and self-explanatory part of social life. This is not to deny the fact that ‘although everyone appears to have some notion of what face entails, a precise definition of it proves to be the most difficult task’ (Ho, 1976, p.

²⁴ *Classic of Poetry* [Chinese: 诗经] is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, containing 305 chronologically authenticated works dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC. There are two opinions about how these poems were collected. Traditional theory states that *Classic of Poetry* was compiled by Confucius around 600 BC, while another theory states that the book has been in existence since long before Confucius’ time (Liu, 1966, p. 11-13).

867). This book defines *face* in a universal sense i.e. the public image that a person claims for him/herself and that is also recognised by others (See more in 3.2). Naturally, *face culture* refers to the conceptualisation of face as a cultural phenomenon and the behavioural modes adopted to deal with '*face wants*'.

This chapter is rooted in the following research: 1) Research results from sociology, social psychology and communication studies, in which face concern and related behaviours have been a recurring theme since a long time. The works of Goffman (1955; 1967), Ho (1976; 1994), Brown and Levinson (1987), Hwang (1987; 2011), Ting-Toomey (1988; 1994), Spencer-Oatey (2007) and Di (2011) have greatly contributed to the study of face culture. Chinese and foreign scholars' studies complement each other, together providing a comprehensive view of the universality and particularity of the Chinese case; 2) Chinese philosophy, especially Confucian ethics, which are very critical in explaining the culturally unique features of Chinese face culture; 3) My own personal experience and viewpoints.

Since face culture exists so conspicuously in Chinese society and daily life, it is believed that any Chinese person or even any foreigner who has a certain amount of contact with Chinese people can obtain plenty of first-hand knowledge or understanding of this culture simply through daily interactions. Being Chinese myself serves as a distinct advantage and I shall be able to cite some typical phenomena that illustrate the characteristics of face culture. This chapter is not a summary of existing opinions, but is an attempt at defining face in a general sense and depict the distinctiveness of Chinese face culture in an academically innovative way. The research framework for this chapter is presented in Figure 3.1.

3.1 Basic Problem: Is Face Culture a Universal Phenomenon or Not?		3.1.1 Cultural-Universal Aspects
		3.1.2 Cultural-Special Aspects
Cultural-Universal Aspects	3.2 Defining Face: From Multiple Sociological Perspectives	3.2.1 Goffman: Positive Social Value
		3.2.2 Brown and Levinson: Public Self-image
		3.2.3 Hu: Reputation
		3.2.4 Definition of this Thesis
	3.3 Behavioural Objectives: Seeking and Saving Face	3.3.1 Seeking Face
		3.3.2 Saving Face
	3.4 Facework: Self-presentation to relationship	3.4.1 Essence of Facework: Self-presentation
		3.4.2 Facework as Self-presentation to Others and to Relationship
Cultural-Special Aspects	3.5 The Cultural Origins of Chinese Face Culture	3.5.1 Linguistic Analysis of 面 and 面子
		3.5.2 Relational Thinking and Hierarchical Perspective

		3.5.3 Rule of <i>Renqing</i>
		3.5.4 Modesty
		3.5.5 Conformity
	3.6 Chinese Facework Models: Dependence on Self-presentation to relationship	
3.7 Two Behavioural Patterns	3.7.1 Behavioural Pattern i:	Showing Superiority
	3.7.2 Behavioural Pattern ii:	Presenting as Acquaintance, Weak and Counterpart
3.8 Conclusion		

Figure 3.1. Outline of Chapter 3.

3.1 Basic Problem: Is Face Culture a Universal Phenomenon or Not?

The following paragraph provides a relatively comprehensive and plausible answer to this question:

Persons universally have face and the desire to maintain or even gain face.

Facework, the actions which are taken to support these desires to maintain or gain

face, can also be found universally. While the universality of face and facework seems to be evident, the specific elements of face and the specific facework strategies seem to vary across different societies or across different situations even in the same society. (Lim, 1994, pp. 209-210)

It has been common consensus that face and facework are undoubtedly universal phenomena in human society as well as a fundamental consideration in social interactions and relationships. On the other hand, the degree to which one cares about face, the specific motivation to seek or save face and how one manages facework are mainly influenced by cultural variability as well as by gender, relations, context and other variables (Ting-Toomy, 1994, p. 3; Kitayama & Markus, 1995, p. 366).

3.1.1 Cultural-universal aspects

From the outset, researchers identified the universality of face concern. Hu Hsien Chin (1944, p. 45), the first scholar to discuss the concept of face academically, claims that the desire for face exists in every human society. According to Goffman (1967, p. 1), every person who lives in a world of social encounters tends to act out 'a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants'. Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that every competent adult in every society needs face and also knows that others need it.

Scholars believe that the universality of *face concern* primarily originates from the basic

psychological need for social recognition. That is, 'when interacting, most members of society are concerned about what others think of them' (Haugh & Hinze, 2003, p. 1581). 'Anyone who does not wish to declare his social bankruptcy must show a regard for face: he must claim for himself, and must extend to others, some degree of compliance, respect, and deference in order to maintain a minimum level of effective social functioning' (Ho, 1976, pp. 881-2).

Facework, as the name suggests, refers to 'the actions taken to deal with the face-wants of one and/or the other' (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 4). We could say that each person, culture and society appears to have its own characteristic repertoire of facework practice, but, nonetheless, there obviously exists a universal set of strategic resources from which individuals across the world choose their facework (Yu, 2003, p. 1684). Just like Chinese facework that is the topic of this thesis, it is difficult to prove that all of its constituent factors are unique to Chinese people and culture alone. They are very likely to be found and observed in other cultures to varying degrees. Differences in facework among cultures are in fact the various clustered preferences of behaviour.

3.1.2 Cultural-special aspects

Clearly, face wants and concrete acts are subject to cultural specifications of many kinds (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 13).

1. *The degree of concern with face.* Face can have an almost quantitative dimension, and people of different cultural backgrounds are frequently described as different in their degree of

face-love (Chang & Holt, 1994, p. 100).

There is consensus about the high degree of face demand in Chinese culture as well as some other East Asian cultures. Empirical studies from cross-cultural anthropology, psychology and sociology reveal that Easterners are more concerned with how they are perceived by others, and they are also more likely than Westerners to feel anxiety concerning their social recognition in public ([Liao & Wang, 2009, p. 990; Abe, Bagozzi, & Sadarangani, 1996; Redding, 1982; Bond, 1991; Kim & Cohen, 2010; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Di, 2011]). For the Chinese, it is behaviourally reasonable to forego tangible rewards for the sake of face, which is valued far more than any of the other objectives of social interactions (Dean, 1983, p. 49). In China, we often describe many phenomena in daily life with a two-part allegorical saying: ‘打肿脸充胖子—死要面子活受罪’ [Literal translation: To slap one’s face until it is swollen in order to look imposing—(one) would be willing to suffer terribly in order to gain face].

2. Dynamics behind gaining and saving face. ‘The uniqueness of Chinese face is that an individual would take actions not only for the face of oneself but also for the face of the greater self’ (Wu, 2013, p. 156). How one defines ‘the greater self’ is completely individual, but what is clear is that the greater self can include one’s family members, friends, the wider community and even one’s ancestors (Ibid.). In particular, an individual’s face is closely linked to the face of his or her family members. ‘Such sayings as, “The children’s misbehaviour is the fault of the father” [Chinese: 子不教, 父之过], or, “The ugly things of the family should not go out of the family’s gate” [Chinese: 家丑不可外扬], underscore the sense of joint responsibility and shared fate involved in family membership’ (King & Bond, 1985, p. 37). Chinese parents can be

commonly heard saying 'Do not make us lose face' [Chinese: 别跟我们丢脸]. Influenced by this, Chinese children generally tend to be cautious and avoid any rash behaviour that may adversely reflect both on them and on their family (Ibid.).

I would like to present my own experience as an example. I completed my doctoral studies in Belgium between 2014 and 2017. Whenever I was worried about failing to complete my PhD, my biggest concerns were: *How will I explain such a failure to my parents? How will my parents face our relatives and friends? My failure will inevitably become my parents' failure in the eyes of other people and will make my parents continuously lose face in front of others. If someone asks my parents how their son is doing in Belgium, they will feel embarrassed and will not know how to maintain the face of the whole family.*

In line with Confucian relationalism, Chinese people have far more spiritual dynamics (or, sometimes, obligations) to pursue and safeguard face in social life, which will be explained more in Section 3.5.2.

3. Behavioural modes of seeking and saving face. Regarding the cultural diversity of facework, Goffman (1967, p. 13) notes, 'the particular set of practices stressed by particular persons or groups seems to be drawn from a single logically coherent framework of possible practices... It is as if face, by its very nature, can be saved only in a certain number of ways, and as if each social grouping must make its selections from this single matrix of possibilities'. In short, different social groups have different facework selections that can be characterised by their distinct cultural features.

Scholars have consistently pointed out that facework is conceptualised in a more relational manner in Chinese culture (e.g. Mao, 1994; Jia, 1997, p. 44, Di, 2011, p. 260; Hwang & Han, 2012, p. 479). Chang and Holt (1994, p. 95), who compare the concept of face in the Western and Chinese cultural contexts, claim that Chinese face places emphasis on human relationships instead of impression management. Based on these research perspectives, I will summarise the behaviour models of Chinese facework in Section 3.6.

3.2 Defining Face: Multiple Sociological Perspectives

Since face is a universal phenomenon, it is necessary to give it a clear definition in its most general sense.

Currently, the bulk of research on this topic comes from the field of sociology. Western studies on face began with the pioneering work of American sociologist Goffman (1955; 1967). Oriental studies mainly started in the 1970s and gradually became an important part of efforts to promote sociological localisation. In this section, I will begin by reviewing the most cited definitions of face and then propose a definition that is aimed to best reflect the universal features of this concept. This section will also discuss some differences between the Chinese and Western ideas of face.

3.2.1 Goffman: Positive social value.

'The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (Goffman, 1967, p. 5)

The most commonly cited definition of face in current research is from Goffman,²⁵ who first tried to clarify the universal meaning of face across cultures. For him, face is just an embodiment of social norms i.e. 'an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes' (Ibid.). More precisely, 'one's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order; it is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have for face and how this feeling is to be distributed among the faces involved' (Ibid., p. 6). Consistent with this logic, the key to gaining face is to follow behavioural rules that a society recognises, which at best 'tends to be of a legitimate, institutionalized kind' (Ho, 1976, p. 7). Likewise, the reason why a person has the wrong face or loses face is that his or her social worth cannot be integrated, even through effort, into the form that is being sustained for him (or her) Ibid., p. 8).

Criticism of Goffman's definition focuses on its ignorance of the human's dynamic role. According to this perspective, the unmentioned society or community, inhabiting in a realm beyond individuals and their interactions, becomes the sole determinant factor of granting or withdrawing face. Correspondingly, face becomes a thing 'on loan to individuals from society,

²⁵ Erving Goffman was a Canadian-American sociologist, long considered the most influential American sociologist of the 20th century. His best known books include *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Asylums* (1961) and *Interaction Ritual* (1967).

and that will be withdrawn from them if they prove unworthy of it' (Goffman, 1967, p. 7). However, in reality, individuals are never only passive recipients of social norms but also can be active creators of them. When social actors deal with the largely ordinary affairs of everyday life, they continually produce accountable social actions and, in doing so, reflexively reproduce the normative framework within which their social actions are carried out (Schutz, 1962; Heritage, 1984). In some situations, an individual can even be autonomic and creative enough to act independently of group standards, through which it is still likely for them to inspire social others and gain recognition (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Sueda, 2014, p. 19). Face can be created and manipulated both endogenously and exogenously, and facework inevitably involves people's personalised preferences and initiatives to a large extent.

Another controversy about Goffman's definition is its emphasis on 'positive social value'. First of all, judgments of what is 'positive' are highly situational and subjective. 'Judgments concerning the extent, loss, or gain of face are based on sets of criteria or standards which vary both cross-culturally and over time within a single culture. These standards are rooted ultimately in the value within a single culture at a particular point in time' (Ho, 1976, p. 874). Even in a small community, a social value may be perceived as positive by one person while it may be considered neutral or negative by another.

Second, at least in China, face very often has nothing to do with a positive quality or any merely positive indication. 'In China, people who have no accomplishment, power, wealth, status or morality still care about their face and seek face, and very often still can obtain face as expected. In contrast, sometimes, those who possess achievement, status, or even sufficient

morality may not necessarily own face' (Di, 2011, p. 73). Chen Zhizhao (1988, p. 75) argues more directly that, 'it is generally known that [in Chinese society] gang members gain face by means of their aggressive and fierce images, and brothel women seek face from a steady flow of clients. You cannot find any positive value in these people's images or face'. Lu Xun (2006, p. 398) expresses a similar viewpoint: '[face] not only belongs to the middle class and the people above them. When it comes to the face issue, even pedicab drivers and the illiterate still strive to maintain their face at all costs and in all circumstances'. To the Chinese, face seems to be a natural right,²⁶ namely, a person can get face without possessing any positive social value.

Third, Goffman's explanation of face does not consider the hierarchical structure of every society. Whether East or West, it can be observed that some people's face is derived from their superior status and involves no positive implication. For example, in the workplace, we always have to give face to our supervisors, even if they are believed to be incapable or unwelcome. In the family, children need to always be concerned with the face of their parents, in many cases not because of their positive actions but just simply because they are parents.

²⁶ There may be a conceptual confusion between *face* and *dignity*. As a counterpart to the concept of face, the concept of dignity refers to 'the conviction that each individual at birth possesses an intrinsic value at least theoretically equal to that of every other person' (Ayers, 1984, p. 19). Dignity culture can be understood as a culture in which every individual is considered to possess inherent value, and that value is not supposed to be judged by others (Kim & Cohen, 2010). However, the concept of face depends on others' judgment and recognition.

3.2.2 Brown and Levinson: Positive face and negative face

'The public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61)

It seems clear that Brown and Levinson centre their ideas on the individual aspect of face. Face is characterised as 'an image that intrinsically belongs to the individual, to the "self"' (Ho, 1976, p. 454), and to protect and enhance one's face is equated with acting in full compliance with the expectations of personal desires (Mao, 1994; Yu, 1999). Compared with Goffman's over-emphasis on society, Brown and Levinson go to the other extreme of only highlighting individual desire and ignoring face's interactive nature.

Brown and Levinson also put forward two kinds of face at the universal level: *positive face* and *negative face*. They interpret negative face as 'the want of every individual to be unimpeded in their actions' and positive face as 'the want to have one's wants approved by others' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). It is assumed that most actions involving speech, such as requests, offers and compliments, inherently threaten either the hearer's or the speaker's face-wants, and that politeness is involved in redressing face-threatening actions (Vilkki, 2006, p. 324).

Their research is criticised for failing to address behaviours in many non-Western cultures where the underlying interactional focus is centred not upon individualism but upon group identity (e.g. Kasper, 1990; O'Driscoll, 1996). For example, 'the speaker's negative face desires are usually negligible or even irrelevant in Chinese sociocultural contexts' (Yu, 2003, p. 1698). Further, 'it is the harmony of individual behavior with the judgment of the community, rather

than the accommodation of individual desires, that Chinese face emphasizes' (Ibid., p. 1685).

3.2.3 Hu's definition: Reputation

'A reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation.'

(Hu, 1944, p. 45)

As mentioned earlier, Hu Hsien Chin was the first scholar to discuss the Chinese concept of face in an academic way. The definition she put forth is solely based on the Chinese cultural background. Regarding how to gain face, she says, '[Face] is built up through initial high position, wealth, power, ability, through cleverly establishing ties to a number of prominent people, as well as through avoidance of acts that would cause unfavourable comment' (Ibid., p. 61).

However, strictly speaking, face and good reputation, honour or prestige are not the same thing. The relation between face and good reputation can be summarised as follows:

1. When good reputation is gained, face may not be gained.

In most situations, a person's good reputation is a primary resource of his or her face, but there is a possibility that it is unaccompanied by face. The key reason is that the individual alone is held accountable for his or her conduct and, hence, what kind of reputation he or she deserves; however, a person's face can be lost or gained as a result of the behaviour of someone else (Ho, 1976, p. 880). The gain of face is not a pure individual effort and always needs others'

recognition. The simplest example is that even if my enemy receives a Nobel Prize and earns a world-class reputation, for me, he or she is still my enemy and hatred will impel me not to give him or her any face on any occasion.

2. When good reputation is lost or has never existed in the first place, face can still be obtained or secured.

As mentioned in Section 3.2.1, in Chinese culture as well as in many other cultures, people with bad reputations can still attain their desired face if it were granted to them by others. In fact, Hu Hsien Chin (1944, p. 57) too acknowledged this fact: 'To give face is not always approved of by society. Sometimes, an individual is elected or appointed to an honorary position without being properly qualified. [In the academic circle,] some person may criticize such actions, but his friends, wise in the affairs of the world, will tell him, "He is an eminent scholar [etc.]", so they decided to give him face'. Evidently, such an argument is totally contradictory to the definition of face she proposed. Lin Yutang (1936, p. 201) in his book *My Country and My People* asserts that 'to confuse face with Western honor is to make a grievous error'. He explains this by means of a specific example: '[In ancient China,] the ugly son of a high-ranking official who goes to a sing-song girl's house is insulted and returns in the company of the police to order the arrest of the sing-song girl and the closing of the house, is getting face, but we would hardly say he is guarding his honor' (Ibid.).

3.2.4 Definition of this thesis

'Face is the public image which a person claims for himself/herself and is also recognized by others.' (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 61; Zhou and Ho, 1992)

This definition is a combination of two pieces of research, both of which seek to give an explanation of face in a universal sense. This argument involves the following key points:

1. The fundamental aim of face concern is orientated towards 'being recognized by others', i.e. social recognition.
2. The essence of face is 'public image', which implies that the nature of face need not necessarily be positive.
3. The interactional attribute of face has been highlighted, that is, face is never a purely individual thing (Ho, 1976, p. 882; Tracy, 1990, p. 210; Cupach, 1994, p. 3). Whatever the context in which communication occurs, and whatever the relationship shared by interactants, it is assumed that each person's face is supported and maintained during the interaction (Goffman, 1967, p. 3). In other words, 'since the claim of face is about one's image held by others, one cannot claim face unilaterally without regard to the other's perspective' (Lim, 1994, p. 210).

3.3 Behavioural Objective: Seeking Face and Saving Face

Prompted by face concern, people in general have two direct behavioural objectives: to seek

face and to save face when face is lost.

3.3.1 Seeking face

For everyone, seeking face is a dynamic and continual life-long process rather than a one-time occurrence. No one can get face once and forever. Goffman (1955, p. 214) states that 'a person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them'. Spatially, a person invariably has different face demands when he or she interacts with different people and in different situations. Temporally, the face gained from someone may be lost at some time in the future or may never be provided by others in the first place.

It should be noted that to seek face is not always a conscious concern of individuals. Sometimes, this goal is deliberate and evident (for instance, when we prepare for a job interview or a public speaking engagement); other times, it is automatic and almost imperceptible (for example, when we mindlessly check our hair in the mirror before stepping out the front door) (Eilot, 2013, p. 2). According to the empirical study of Cupach and Metts (1994, p. 4), couples in general have the continuous need to gain face from each other, but only a few of them sit at the dinner table and talk about their face needs. In this sense, face needs have become a goal that does not have much conscious thought behind it.

More often, face per se is not an end goal in itself. People always expect that gaining face will

bring about realistic interest, closer interpersonal relationships, freedom of behaviour, feelings of respect and so on. These spillover effects are sometimes the real reason people seek face.

3.3.2 Saving face

To save face can be the effort to restore one's discredited public image by creating a previously existing or a new more favourable one (Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 523).

The need to save face comes from the risk of losing face. Strictly speaking, losing face in real life is more often reflected as a process of erosion of face—a decline of recognition—rather than a total loss of one's previously obtained recognition (Ho, 1976, p. 871; Wu, 2013, p. 157). For example, I feel I have lost face when my research work is criticised by my PhD supervisor; however, this does not mean that I have no face at all in front of him.

For everyone, face is 'a vulnerable interpersonal commodity during interaction' (Oetzel et al., 2007, p. 384) and any interaction is potentially face-threatening. 'Even the most skillfull and well-intended communicator sometimes finds himself or herself in the position of having felt diminished by receiving a complaint or criticism from someone else' (Cupach, 1994, p. 5). 'The possibility of losing face can arise not only from the individual's failure to meet his obligations but also from the failure to act in accordance with his expectations of them—that is, not only from the individual's own actions, but also from how he is treated by others' (Ho, 1976, p. 873). Surely, sometimes, face may be lost only because of deliberate and unilateral provocation by others.

Losing face often means negating one's personal attributes or credit and further hindering one's subsequent functioning in social encounters. During an interaction in which one's face has been lost or threatened, most of the times this person will also feel uncomfortable and embarrassed, as the entire interaction has been disrupted (Cupach, 1994, p. 2). Compared with Westerners, Chinese people adopt a more pessimistic attitude towards the consequences of losing face. Jia (1997, p. 45) argues that as face is the definition of being fully human in the Chinese context and it is the ticket to full membership in the community, to lose face would 'negatively affect the community and consequentially the loser would be ostracized by the community'.

Based on the above negative effects of losing face, to save face is deemed a more vital objective than to gain face. 'Not everyone is eager or needs to gain face, but everyone who cares for maintaining a minimum level of effective social functioning must see to it that his face is protected from being lost' (Ho, 1976, p. 872). Empirical psychological studies also reveal that in Chinese face culture, a prevention-focused orientation that regulates the avoidance of losses is more salient and prevalent than a promotion-focused orientation that regulates the attainment of gains as a self-regulatory strategy (e.g. Higgins, 1997; Eliot, et al., 2001; Hamamura, et al., 2009). For example, in daily life in China, being honest about one's feelings in relationships is not acceptable as such behaviour bears the risk of offending the other's face. Even if you really want to express anger or a complaint, hiding one's real feelings and maintaining a temporary calm are still regarded as the most mature and wise ways to save each other's face.

3.4 Facework: Self-presentation to Others and to Relationship

3.4.1 Essence of facework: self-presentation

In previous studies, researchers had a generally limited understanding of facework, seeing it more as reactions to face-threatening behaviours. Goffman (1967, p. 12) defines facework as ‘communication designed to counteract face threats to self and others’.²⁷ For Brown and Levinson (1987), facework is largely described as appropriate and polite behaviour with a focus on face-threat mitigation. Obviously, facework needs a more comprehensive understanding. In this study, I use the definition presented by Tae-Seop Lim (1994, p. 211): ‘the actions taken to deal with the face-wants of one and/or the other’. Any action that expresses face concern can be interpreted as a kind of facework.

From the perspective of psychology, in essence, facework is a typical kind of self-presentation, i.e., ‘any behavior intended to create, modify, or maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others’ (Eliot, 2013, p. 2). Depending on the object of the presentation, self-presentation can be divided into *self-presentation to the self*, *to others* and *to relationship*. The core argument of this book is that facework intrinsically consists of self-presentation to others and to relationship.

Before explaining the three types of self-presentation, the concept of ‘self’ should be clarified.

Below is an explanation from Kwang-Kuo Hwang (2011, p. 126).

²⁷ Goffman (1967) further categorises facework into two types. On many occasions, face-threatening acts can be avoided or minimised before they occur through the use of *preventive facework*. On other occasions, face threats are not anticipated and the loss of face must be remediated through *corrective facework*.

Self is a psychological concept defining human beings as the locus of experience, including the most important aspect of experiencing oneself as a particular identity. Western psychologists usually assume that an individual's competence in reflexive awareness creates a duality of self. The self as a subject integrates behavior and makes one distinctive from others, resulting in a sense of self-identity. The self as an object of awareness enables one to examine one's differences with other objects in the world, and to view oneself as a unique whole with a sense of personal identity.

Self-presentation to the self.

This term refers to the idea of 'match[ing] one's self-presentation to one's own ideal self' (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987, p. 61). In most instances, it is mediated purely by a cognitive process, deciding a person's ideas about 'what he/she would *like to be* and thinks he/she *really can be*, at least at his or her best' (Leary & Kowals, 1990, p. 35). Presumably, any self-relevant thought or behaviour must involve self-presentation to the self. 'None would deny that people's ideas about themselves are one factor that determines the public impressions they try to create' (Eilert, 2013, p. 21). In reality, when someone tries to perform self-presentation for others, he or she is very likely to highlight certain aspects of themselves that they feel are easy to display to others. Also, when someone attempts to engage in the self-presentation to relationship, they will tend to choose a relational identity that best suits their preferences or

expectations.

However, it should be noted that self-presentation to the self cannot per se constitute a person's facework. Due to the interactive attribute of face, the object of facework cannot be purely the self and should at least have one out-of-self factor—another, a relationship or both.

3.4.2 Facework as self-presentation to others and to relationship

Self-presentation to others

For a long time, academic interpretations of facework have only focused on self-presentation to others. This kind of behaviour focuses on the perceptions one individual holds regarding how others expect him or her to be, implying that the core task of facework is to first understand the audience's expectations and then to seek recognition by meeting the expectations.

'Others' here refers not only to specific individuals but also to society at large. It is conceivable that, many times, the audience's expectations are just the ground rules of social interaction; many performances facework are targeted at virtually making a person's public image accommodate as closely as possible to prototypic characteristics endowed by social norms. In this case, the face-giving side and face-obtaining side just follow the commonly agreed upon scripts of facework with full deliberation, and the individual in facework is a role-player 'mechanically performing the role-related behavior prescribed by the social structure' (King & Bond, 1985, p. 31).

Self-presentation to relationship

Everyone would agree that compared with strangers, it is much easier to gain face from one's own family members or friends or even from someone you may have met just once before. What is being recognised here is not one's individualistic performance or features but instead the position he or her occupies in a particular relationship (Ringmar, 2015, p. 51). Just from daily life experiences, we have been able to conclude that, like meeting others' expectations may entail gaining face, showing or promoting a sound relationship with others may achieve the same effect in facework.

For a long time, the relational parameters of face and face behaviour were not identified (Ting-Toomy, 1994, p. 2). Nowadays, a growing number of scholars conceptualise facework as self-presentation to relationship, namely, 'a means of manipulating a given relationship for seeking recognition' (cf. Lim, 1994, p. 211; Zhou & Zhang, 2015).

There are mainly two reasons why facework can be seen as self-presentation to relationship. First, the social self is irreducibly a relational self, existing constantly in relation to other social selves (Arundale, 2006, pp. 200-201). No one can view or treat others and the world at large without relational consideration. Second, as a relationship invariably manifests through interaction and face is the product of interaction, a person's facework is a part of the relationships he or she is involved in. As Arundale (2006, p. 202) argues, 'face meanings and actions arise, and are maintained and changed in relationships'.

The focus of self-presentation to relationship is on 'properties, conditions, or states evinced in the interpersonal relationship' (Arundale, 2010, p. 2086). Most of the time, facework is very easy: to manifest an established connection you share with the opposite side, or, in other words, to remind the other side of the existence of the relationship and then to receive his or her recognition unconditionally. This is a universal fact applicable to the whole world and may even be the earliest social skill that a person acquires in life. Even as children, we realised that it is easier to seek recognition by greeting familiar persons or emphasising existing relations with others. The logic behind this behaviour is that it is natural and reasonable to give me face for the sake of the maintenance and improvement of our relationship. Giving face becomes a 'fulfillment of natural relational obligation' (Levy & Kowalski, 1990, p. 41).

Another situation is that individuals can persistently attempt to characterise or adjust their position in a relationship so as to achieve recognition, especially when the person from whom you seek recognition has no idea or expectation about you. In this sense, self-presentation to relationship is not purely 'presentation' but incorporates more elements such as the manipulation of the relationship, trying to change the nature of the relationship, giving a favourable interpretation to the relationship, exaggerating the intimacy of the relationship, positioning oneself as superior or inferior in status etc. All of these presentations are believed to be able to influence the target person's perception of the relationship, to create, modify or maintain an impression of the other person and eventually to provide or feel the recognition for which one aspired.

Unlike self-presentation to others, self-presentation to relationship represents a manifestation

of *relational ontology*, i.e. shifting 'analytical attention away from entities [the substance] with static and given properties, be they persons or states, to relations under constant construction among those entities' (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011, p. 49). This is the biggest difference between these two kinds of self-presentation. In addition, it can be found that self-presentation to relationship is not necessarily geared towards pleasing an audience and usually does not reflect a person's true characteristics. According to one's judgment of a situation, someone may desire to present him/herself as helpless or needy, as morally virtuous or as seemingly familiar. All of these are very likely to involve playacting and affectation but indeed may be helpful to allow the recognition-seeker to occupy a favourable position in the relationship and, moreover, help one acquire one's desired recognition.

Surely, in real life, self-presentation to relationship and self-presentation to others are very often simultaneously and integratively adopted. It is hard to use only a single approach when trying to conduct successful or seamless facework.

3.5 The Cultural Origins of Chinese Face Culture

In a news report, Canadian businessman John Lombard, who has been in China for 23 years and understands Chinese psychology, expressed a feeling of frustration in the following words:

'If I could choose, I still like the western way of communication, simple and straight. *Mianzi* [face] and *Guanxi* [human relation] are too difficult. I have learned for so many years, and only can avoid making big mistakes.' (As cited in A

A full understanding of face culture in Chinese society necessitates considering the complex cultural background, particularly the metaphysical foundations, that are deemed to be prerequisites for all Chinese people. In this section, Chinese face culture will be dealt with firstly from its linguistic perspective and secondly and mainly in terms of its roots in philosophical thought.

A good way to understand Chinese culture is to first understand Chinese philosophy. Feng Youlan (1948, p. 3), the most outstanding Chinese philosopher of the 20th century, claims that, in Chinese culture, philosophy enjoys the same status as religion does in other cultures. He believes that Chinese philosophy focuses not only on practical knowledge that can help people deal with human affairs but also on super-moral values that help them access and understand what lies beyond the tangible world (Ibid., pp. 6-14). There is an interesting proverb that describes Chinese philosophy as follows: 'It is not divorced from daily ordinary activities, yet it goes straight to what antedated Heaven [Chinese: 不离日用常行内，直到先天未画前]'.²⁸

Among all the Chinese philosophical schools of thought, Confucian ethics has been and continues to be the most influential in the daily life and social order of the Chinese. Derk Bodde says, 'it is ethics (especially Confucian ethics), not religion, that provided the spiritual basis in Chinese civilization' (1942, p. 293). A number of scholars even regard Confucianism²⁸ as a

²⁸ Confucianism refers to a system of philosophical and ethical teachings by the most celebrated Chinese philosopher Confucius (c. 551–479 B.C.) in the 6th century B.C. It was the state orthodoxy in China until the early 20th century and has had a widespread and profound influence in many East Asian societies. The basic concepts of Confucianism are ethical: love for one's

system of ethics (e.g. Needham, 1970, p. 24; Zaehner, 1988, p. 370) that serves to ‘to orient the life of the people and to define their moral standards and ethical ideal in most parts of East Asia’ (Yao, 2000, p. 32). Obviously, Confucian ethics are also bound to contribute to the behavioural dynamics and prototypes of Chinese face culture. According to Jia (2001, p. 20), ‘Confucianism played a crucial role in making the Chinese concept of face become a more pervasive, more deeply rooted, more dominant form of life and government in Chinese society’. Sections 3.5.2-3.5.5 will shed light on some of China’s core values, including its relational thinking, hierarchical view, rule of *renqing*, modesty and conformity.

3.5.1 Linguistic analysis of 面 and 面子

In modern daily English, the term ‘face’ is ‘employed in only a small number of fixed expressions, such as “to save face”, “to lose face”, and “to put on a good face”’ (Yu, 2003, p. 1686). In contrast, *face* has a much more flexible and diverse set of meanings in Chinese. A linguistic analysis is directly relevant to understand the status of the word 面子 [*face*] along with its various associations in Chinese language and thinking.

The Chinese character 面²⁹ can be traced back to the 14th century B.C. (Hu, 1944, p. 45; Jia, 2001; Di, 2011, P. 88). Research on the Oracle Bone Inscription reveals that 面 originally refers

fellow man, filial piety, decorum, virtue and the ideal of the superior man. This study mainly focuses on its ethics, values and thoughts.

²⁹ The Chinese character 子 in the word 面子 is just a suffix for single-syllable nouns and has no specific meaning. Consequently, I first and primarily discuss the meaning of 面.

to the physical face. However, in ancient times, this character took on some extensional meanings to describe a person's social, moral and psychological characteristics. One of the earliest written appearances of this term is in the *Classic of Poetry*, the oldest existing work in Chinese literature. There is a very famous Chinese poem: 'If a person can endure the sloppy appearance and lack of sense of shame, he only has his head rather than face' [Chinese: 忍丑少羞, 无面有头]. The *Records of the Grand Historian*³⁰, a monumental book on the history of ancient China, completed around 109 B.C., mentions a rebel leader called Xiang Yu who made a significant mark on China's history when he decided to commit suicide after a crushing defeat: 'Even though my hometown people pity me and still serve me as their king, I have had no face to face them' [Chinese: 纵江东父老怜而王我, 我何面目见之]. This saying still appears frequently in daily conversations in China when someone feels desperate about a great failure or setback.

面子 as a word arguably first appeared in the early Ming Dynasty [1368-1644] when it began to turn up frequently in the novels of that time (Di, 2011, p. 89). In various Chinese dictionaries, the explanations of the word 面子 are almost always similar—prestige or reputation. Evidently, these explanations are merely most people's intuitive understanding of this word. From the linguistic perspective, 面子 is a highly active and reproductive word in the Chinese language. Figure 3.2 presents some common phrases containing the word 面子, which show the diversity of Chinese behaviours around the concept of face.

³⁰ *Records of the Grand Historian* [Chinese: 史记] was begun by Sima Tan [165-110 B.C.] and completed by his son Sima Qian (145?-86? B.C.), who is generally considered to be the father of Chinese historiography. Consisting of 130 chapters, it covers the history of the Chinese people from the days of the Yellow Emperor (2698-2598 B.C.) until the time of the historians.

Chinese phrases about <i>face</i>	English translation
爱面子/顾面子/好面子	Be concerned about face
争面子/要面子/讲面子	Seek face
给面子	Give face
有面子	Have face
保全面子/维持面子	Maintain face
碍面子	Bothered by face
丢面子/掉面子	Lose face
卖面子	Give face as a present
扫面子/伤面子/不给面子/驳...的面子	Violate face
没面子	Have no face
面子不好看/面子挂不住	Have a bad face
留面子/挽回面子/找回面子	Save face
不讲面子/不顾面子	Have no consideration of sb.'s face

撕破面子	Cast aside all considerations of face
看在...的面子上	For the sake of sb.'s face

Figure 3.2. Chinese phrases about *face*.

This linguistic phenomena leads to one question: why do the Chinese customarily use the character 面 and the word 面子 to refer to this complicated social and psychological behaviour?

From a biological point of view, the head is considered to be the most important part of the human body, and the face represents a person's external image. Darwin (1997, p. 572) says, 'As the face with us is chiefly admired for its beauty, so with savages it is the chief seat of mutilation'. Moreover, the face is also the seat of emotion and expressions, which are reliably associated with certain emotional states (e.g. Ortony & Turner, 1990; Russel, 1994, p. 102). Darwin (1997, pp. 574-576) emphasises that facial expressions corresponding to certain emotions are a biologically innate and evolutionally adaptive ability of human beings. Oatley and Jenkins (1992, p. 67) observe, 'by far the most extensive body of data in the field of human emotions is that on facial expressions of emotion'. In daily life, we all sense that facial expressions reveal our emotions to others unconsciously or consciously, and many of us have tried to interpret others' facial expressions to improve our interaction. Thus, it was but natural for the character 面, from the start, to perform the task of describing one's inner world.

According to historians, it is more likely that the word 面子 is derived from the character 面,

which means 'mask' or 'face tool'. Masks were 'used in ceremonies as a means to communicate with the spirits and deities in primitive Chinese society', and 'later also functioned as an identity card for each tribe' (Sueda, 2014, p. 24). Owners of masks were always the most powerful men in the tribe—chiefs or priests. In a worship ceremony, a mask symbolised a sacred status and supernatural power, whereas losing a mask was akin to losing one's identity card to verify one's leadership or membership of a community (Yi, 1996, pp. 126-127). As an extension of this logic, a mask served as a symbol of status, prestige and group identification, and the character 面 was gradually adopted to describe people's favoured public image in social life. Even today, people with much face in Chinese society are often described using the idiom 神通广大, meaning 'having great magic power and broad access to spirits'.

Culturally, Confucianism emphasises the complementary relationship between a person's outward appearance and his or her inherent qualities. Once, a student of Confucius called Zi Xia asked him why a girl described in the *Classic of Poetry* could have an unusually beautiful face. Confucius replied that her pure soul granted her wonderful beauty. The old Chinese saying 'Face springs from the heart' [Chinese: 面由心生] means that a person's face is the reflection of his or her state of mind. According to this logic, only someone with a pure and rich inner world would have a beautiful face. Meanwhile, Confucianism also underlines the necessity of maintaining a decent appearance. *The Book of Rites*, a core text in the Confucian canon, points out, 'human nature is prescribed by propriety and justice. The first step of abiding by propriety and justice is to pay attention to personal grooming, have an elegant bearing and maintain courteous talking'. This shows that China's traditional emphasis on etiquette included a

concern with one's outward appearance. Based on such complementary relationships that Confucianism advocates, we can infer that the traditional cultural context also contributed in one way or another to the expansion of the character 面 and the word 面子 at the semantic level.

3.5.2 Relational thinking and hierarchical view

Relational thinking in Chinese philosophy.

The underlying theme of most ancient Chinese philosophy is 'to seek balance and harmony between humans and nature, humans and society and humans and ego' (Hwang, 2011, p. 127). This is closely related to the realistic needs of ancient Chinese society. Chinese philosophy arguably originated during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 B.C.), when Chinese society had witnessed years of wars, social unrest and general discontent. The various philosophical theories (e.g. Daoism, Confucianism and Mohism) of the time were deeply rooted in practical concerns and primarily aimed to restore good order and relational harmony in society (Dessein, 2001, pp. 100-101). 'This pragmatic approach to philosophical questions conditioned the content of Chinese philosophical reflection for the coming ages' (Matthyssen, 2012, p. 48). Moreover, in a typically agricultural society, most people in ancient China were attached for life to a small community and had very limited freedom of mobility (Wei & Li, 2013, p. 64). Maintaining harmonious relationships with others naturally became a crucial aspect of ancient Chinese daily life as well as the different systems of philosophy.

Confucianism, as the most dominant school of philosophy in ancient as well as contemporary Chinese society, is a consistent ethic for guiding and restricting human relations. Confucian philosophy has two core viewpoints:

1) **Man is a relational being.** In the Confucian world, man cannot exist as an independent entity, and 'all actions must be in a form of interaction between man and man' (Hu Shih, as cited in King & Band, 1985, p. 31). Since childhood, Chinese people are instructed that 'an individual's life can be meaningful only through coexistence with others' (Ho et al., 1991). On the one hand, the Chinese are highly sensitive to others (Hwang, 2011, p. 192), to 'his/her relations with others, above, below, or on equal footing with him/her' (King & Bond, 1985, p. 31). On the other hand, they have no distinctive awareness of their own independence and habitually find it unnecessary to maintain a clear-cut boundary between oneself and others.

2] **Human relations are causal, having the power to constitute a person's own existence, uniqueness and intention.** Specifically, man is socially situated, defined and shaped by the relational context (King & Band, 1985, p. 31), and the relation between man and material also depends on the relation between man and man. It is not strange that to most Chinese people, face or social recognition is just a natural corollary of harmonious or acceptable relationships.

From ancient times until today, Western philosophy has tended to worry about the inherent tension between individual autonomy and interdependence that comes with human relations, but such a contradiction has seemingly never been a part of Chinese people's collective anxiety or primary philosophical question. Coherently, the Chinese seldom have any aspiration towards

ideal individual autonomy through the gain of face.

Relational thinking in Chinese social life

Guanxi

‘Without *guanxi*, you will achieve nothing.’

I have heard this saying countless times throughout my life. Chinese people generally believe that one effective way of getting things done is by establishing and improving *guanxi* i.e. interpersonal relations (e.g. King, 1991; Hwang, 2000, Hu et al., 2004). Below is a concise introduction of the Chinese understanding of the constitution and benefit of *guanxi*:

These include relationships founded on family ties, neighborly ties and ties springing from common geographic origins, ties of shared experience and ties of shared interest. It involves the use of such personal ties to circumvent bureaucratic procedures, obtain access to scarce resources and ensure preferential treatment.

(Brick, 2004, p. 107)

Guan (2009, p. 1) believes that unlike the Western concepts of ‘networking’ or ‘social capital’, the Chinese concept of *guanxi* implies reciprocal obligation. In the Chinese mind, *guanxi* could ‘engender trust in a target person, which results in positive behaviors toward the target person, and these behaviors are reciprocated’ (Leung, 2010, p. 231). Brantly Womack (2008, p. 296) refers to the Chinese way of thinking as ‘the logic of relationships’, which optimistically

assumes that both sides are better off if they maintain a good and stable relationship. For him, 'this is a fundamentally different attitude from that of the modern West, which has tended to use the carpenter's rule of its own norms to level and if necessary pressurise others into uniformity' (Ibid.).

Literature about China and its society always reminds foreigners of the importance of *guanxi* when interacting with the Chinese, depicting it as a crucial factor for achieving business success in China. Buckley et al. (2006) suggest that foreign entrepreneurs in China should be conscious of how to manipulate *guanxi* and play by its rules to establish better institutional connections with China's local government and businessmen. There is certainly criticism that the Chinese tend to resist formal rules and prefer flexibility and 'behind-the-scenes' business dealings even in today's globalised and modern times.

The notion of *guanxi* also leads to reserved, indirect communication that tends to reveal only part of the story. In Chinese social life, 'interpersonal discord and aggressiveness may be handled, not by direct confrontation, but by interactants exchanging well-designed manipulative messages' (Chang, 2001, p. 159). Rendering direct and open criticism normally risks and destroys *guanxi* in Chinese social life, and, on many occasions, especially in interactions with superiors, such behaviour is morally impermissible. Leaving some room for others' mistakes or differences is the Chinese way of life.

Family and filial piety.

'The Chinese always say of themselves that their nation is like "a tray of loose

sands” [Chinese: 一盘散沙], each grain being, not an individual but a family’. (Lin, 1936, p. 177)

Among the Chinese, perhaps the most important social relationships are those with one’s family members. In Western culture, family is regarded as the basic unit of the social structure; nevertheless, it can still be divided into a smaller unit i.e. a person with an independent personality and free will. However, in traditional Chinese society, the most basic social unit remains the family, and family cannot be divided into individuals (Yi, 1996, pp. 239-240). A person’s identity, status, value, rights, duties and responsibilities are believed to be tightly linked with their families and family members. As Hsu (1983, p. 124) notes, in America, success in one’s life mainly depends on whether one’s performance has been accepted or praised by one’s peers and by society at large; however, in China, success would be regarded as incomplete if it does not bring honour to your parents, family members and even your ancestors.

In addition, the Chinese view of relations has ingrained in it the concept of filial piety. That is, a person’s greatest responsibility in society is to respect, obey and support one’s parents, and doing so is more significant than any other affair or interest (including one’s own self-interest) (Di, 2011, pp. 119-120). Specifically, the minimum requirement of filial piety is to obey one’s parents’ will unconditionally and support them when they become old,³¹ and the greatest pursuit of life is to gain success and share it with one’s parents (Cai, 2004, p. 16). Furthermore,

³¹ Until now, so many Chinese still believe in the traditional idea that ‘raising children (especially sons) is aimed at guiding against troubles in the old age’ [养儿防老]. In Chinese society, not supporting and looking after one’s old parents is an unforgivable offence.

Confucian ethics even regard filial piety as a substitute for laws or regulations. Confucius claims, ‘the father can conceal the misconduct of the son, and the son can conceal the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this [Chinese: 父为子隐，子为父隐，直乃其中矣]’. It means that protecting the kinship between parents and children can be done at the cost of social justice or law and order.

This kind of thinking also extends to other kinds of interpersonal relationships such as between equals. For example, as a son or daughter, I have the duty to conceal the misdeeds of my parents in front of other people; likewise, as a subordinate or student, I have a self-evident obligation to conceal the mistakes or negative characteristics of my boss or teacher in front of others.

Hierarchical view in Chinese social life.

According to Confucian ethics, the ideal nature of an interpersonal relationship is hierarchical rather than equal. To be specific, ‘the individuals are best recognized and understood by their unequal social status and positions in their social network rather than their personal attributes as equal human beings’ (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 528). China’s most prominent sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1998, pp. 34-35) claims, ‘the Chinese people’s most favorite saying is “all the people in the world are brothers” [Chinese: 四海之内皆兄弟]. However, this does not mean treating the brothers around the world with Christianity’s egalitarian love. Social interactions for the Chinese still need to comply with social ethics and hierarchy’.

The Chinese hierarchical view is virtually a kind of family-liked ranking one. According to Confucian ethics, 'since the family serves as the basis of the society, one should interact with the outside world much in the same way as one relates to members of the family' (Chang & Holt, 1994, p. 104). 'The regulating factors in family relationships are said to be extendable to the whole town, the whole society, and consequently, to the whole country' (Ibid.). Confucians regard the relationships between father and son, sovereign and subordinate, husband and wife, elder brother and younger and among friends to be the most fundamental relationships in society and have dubbed them the five cardinal relationships [Chinese: 五伦]. 'Excepting for the relationship between friends, according to Confucianism, the other four relationships have an appropriate type of interaction in accordance with the relative superior/inferior positions' (Hwang, 2011, p. 109).³²

Confucians also note that the ideal relationship between father and son is the primary relational model for most interpersonal relationships i.e. to treat your sovereign, husband, elder brother and anyone who is superior to you just like you treat your parents i.e. according to Confucian ethics.³³ According to the Confucian classic *Liji* [English: *Book of Rites*],³⁴ the

³² Zheng Lihua (2012, p. 91) believes that even between and among friends, Chinese people still use hierarchical views to manipulate friendship: 'The ideal friendship in China is always compared to a "brotherhood". That means that the younger one has the duty to look after and respect the older one [in a friendship].'

³³ In Chinese society, there are many sayings to highlight this thought. For example, 'One day as a teacher, a life as your father' [Chinese: 一日为师, 终生为父], or, for girls, 'Be obedient to your father at home, obey your husband after you get married' [Chinese: 在家从父, 出嫁随夫] or, 'An elder brother is like a father' [Chinese: 长兄为父]. These sayings clearly show that the 'father' is always the role model and must be respected and obeyed in social life.

³⁴ *Liji*, written during the Warring States Period (5th century–221 B.C.), is a collection of texts from Confucius' students and other scholars of the time, describing the moral norms, social structures and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty.

following rules should be considered righteous by all humans:

Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of the elders, and deference on that of juniors; benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister. (as cited in Hwang, 2011, p. 110)

It should be noted that Confucian ethics also put forward a code of conduct for superiors i.e. the superior party should take responsibility for the inferior, listen to him/her and care about his/her well being (Ringmar, 2015, p. 51). Accordingly, the ideal social model for traditional Chinese society is as follows: ‘The ruler looks after the people, the people respect the ruler, and at each level such an unequal but reciprocal system of exchange serves to maintain order’ (Liu & Liu, 2003, p. 48).

Certainly, a person’s position is always changing in different social interactions, and he or she can also occupy different positions at the same time (Matthyseen, 2012, p. 80). In order to correctly obey hierarchical rules and avoid making mistakes in daily interactions, people are not allowed to directly address each other by their names but more often use words or titles that show the hierarchy of their relationship. For instance, in English, the father’s and mother’s brothers are both addressed as ‘Uncle’; however, in Chinese, the father’s elder brother should be addressed as *Bo* [伯] and the younger brother as *Shu* [叔], while the mother’s brothers should

be addressed as *Jiu* [舅].³⁵ Moreover, Chinese also uses a number of adjectives (mainly 'big' or 'small') to rank and differentiate among themselves. For example, my father has four brothers and I am expected to respectively address them as 'Big Bo' (the oldest brother), 'Second Bo' (the brother younger than my *Big Bo*), 'Fourth Shu' (the brother who was born just before my father) and 'Small Shu' (the youngest brother). My mother only has two brothers, and I address them respectively as 'Big Jiu' and 'Small Jiu'. In China's workplaces as well, it is very impolite and risky to address others, especially someone who is your superior, using their full name, and the common practice is to refer to them using the format 'Title + Family Name'. Furthermore, even 'among equals in China it is a gross breach of politeness to call a person by his given name' (Holcombe, 2001[1895]:263).

Effects on Chinese face culture.

- **Relational thinking in Chinese philosophy and social life constitutes the fundamental dynamic of Chinese face concern and behaviours.** 'Under the influence of Confucian relationalism, Chinese people are concerned not only about enhancing or losing face of one's "small self", but also about enhancing or losing face of one's "big self" arising from significant moral or social episodes' (Hwang & Han, 2010, p. 479). The bigger self can include family members, friends, the wider community and even one's ancestors. Face

³⁵ According to Confucianism, *Bo* deserves the most respect, followed by *Shu* and, finally, *Jiu*. There is also a similar naming system to refer to one's parents' sisters.

manifests as a collective property instead of an individual thing.³⁶

- **The Chinese tend to think of facework more from the relational perspective.** The kind of face a Chinese person gets can be considered a part of his or her public image, which not only depends on but is also determined by his or her relationship with others. The Chinese generally believe that if their relationships with others are managed well, face can be gained and saved easily. This study claims that such a mind-set makes the Chinese focus more on self-presentation in relationships (see more in Section 3.6).
- **The Chinese concept of face is inherently hierarchical** (Jia, 1997, p. 45). As mentioned above, status cannot be equated with face, but it is not contradictory to the viewpoint that in the Chinese context, status is the most important factor—and often the only factor—that determines whether one’s face exists or not and how much face can be gained. Correspondingly, ‘any factor that may damage one’s status or anything that may sway an individual’s status in their interpersonal network might make them feel face loss’ (Hwang & Han, 2012, p. 488). In addition, giving face to superiors or high-ranking people unconditionally is regarded as necessary and even compulsory in social interactions and is regarded as an extension of filial piety (see more in Sections 3.6 and 3.7.1).

³⁶ When Western theorists discuss face, they basically regard it as a phenomenon based on a person’s individual needs or interests. For example, Goffman explains face concern like so: ‘He may want to save his own face because of his emotional attachment to the image of self which it expresses, because of his pride and honor, because of the power his presumed status allows him to exert over the other participants, and so on’ (Goffman, 1967, p. 12). As such, Brown and Levinson’s concept of face centred on the individual aspect. For them, ‘this self-image primarily concerns the individual’s desires, and only to the extent that the self depends on others’ face being maintained does this image become public’ (Yu, 2001, p. 1685).

3.5.3 The rule of *renqing*

Renqing: meaning and importance

Renqing [Chinese: 人情] is an emic cultural aspect of Chinese society that has two kinds of meanings. The first is empathy and sympathy in the sense of psychology (Hwang, 1987, p. 953); the second is similar to favours, such as a gift presented by one person to another in the course of a social exchange (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 70). This section will focus on the first meaning of this concept.

The best saying that illustrates the rule of *renqing* in Chinese culture comes from Confucius: ‘Do not impose upon others what you do not desire yourself’ [Chinese: 己所不欲，勿施于人], or, from a more positive perspective, ‘now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others’ [Chinese: 己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人]. Specifically, if someone is able to understand another’s emotional responses to various life situations—feeling happy or sad when and as others do, or even catering to their tastes and avoiding whatever they dislike—then we may say that such a person knows *renqing* (Hwang, 1987, p. 953). In psychological terms, *renqing* is empathy, which is defined as ‘an affective state that stems from the apprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and that is congruent with it’ (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987, p. 91). In addition, *renqing* also involves the advocacy of sympathy. According to Confucian ethics, ‘when a member of one’s reticulum gets into trouble or faces a difficult situation, one should

sympathize, offer help, and do a *renqing* for that person' (Hwang, 1987, p. 955).

Renqing rule highlights the necessity of the norm of reciprocity,³⁷ exerting a mutually restrictive, even coercive, power upon social practice. In facework, Chinese people are always under strong constraint to act in a manner consistent with the requirements for maintaining his/her face as well as for reciprocating a due regard for the face of others. (Ho, 1976, p. 873)

Renqing as a social norm holds a central position in Chinese society and behaviours. Lin Yutang (1936, p. 86) describes it as follows:

For a Westerner, it is usually sufficient for a proposition to be logically sound. For a Chinese, it is not sufficient that a proposition be logically correct, but it must be at the same time in accord with human nature. In fact, to be 'in accord with human nature', to be *renqing*, is greater than to be logical. For a theory could be so logical as to be totally devoid of common sense. The Chinese are willing to do anything against reason, but they will not accept anything that is not plausible in the light of human nature.

For the Chinese, to say that a person 'does not know about or is not concerned about *renqing*' implies that this person lacks worldly wisdom or has a cold and indifferent personality. Instead, when we praise someone and describe them as having a good understanding of *renqing*, we

³⁷ It has been admitted that the norm of reciprocity is a universal one, which is a basic moral rule of social cohesion in most cultures (Gouldner, 1960; Levi-Strauss, 1969). However, there still exist differences in this norm among cultures, including its application to different domains of interpersonal ties, ways of repayment and levels of expectation (Hwang, 2011, p. 93).

mean that this person has a high emotional quotient (EQ) and is good at dealing with interpersonal relationships.

Manners of different orders

Confucianism advocates that one should apply the rule of *renqing* to everyone, but, in reality, Chinese people generally never attain this ideal. How widely the Chinese would like to give *renqing* to others is also an important aspect of this rule.

Individualism and *collectivism* are the two most frequently cited terms by theorists across disciplines in discussions on cultural differences between the East and the West (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Ting-Toomy, 1988; Triandis, 1995). Generally speaking, in individualistic cultures, individuals assume responsibility for themselves and their immediate families. In collectivistic cultures, individual belongs to collectivities or in-groups that look after them in exchange for their loyalty (Hofstede, 1980). However, an increasing number of theorists have realised that collectivism is an incomplete conception of culture that cannot effectively capture the richness of interpersonal behaviours in Asian societies (e.g. Hui and Triandis, 1986; Kin & Nam, 1998, p. 523). *Renqing* especially cannot be explained purely in terms of collectivism, as it does not explain why the Chinese tend to value *renqing* in some social groups but devalue or ignore it in others and why different people have different preferences about it.

Fei Xiaotong proposes the theory of *Manners of Different Orders* to describe the Chinese psychological characteristic of alienation. Fei (2005, pp. 30-31) compares the evolution of

Chinese interpersonal relationships to a stone cast in water, generating ripples that move outward from the centre: the innermost ripples represent those closest to the social actor, with the different rings of the ripple effect representing different degrees of social intimacy and obligation. This metaphor thus 'not only emphasizes the self-centeredness of the Chinese individual, but also the high-contextuality and elasticity of social relationships; each social relationship can take priority over another one depending on the context' (Matthyseen, 2012, p. 81). Clearly, Fei's analogy defies the traditional classification of Chinese people or culture as 'collectivist', implying instead that a Chinese person's social network will differentiate based on his or her judgment of the closeness of the relationships.

Fei Xiaotong further proposes the concept of 'situational morality' i.e. 'the closer the circle, the more [the] moral weight' (Ibid., p. 83). Relational closeness or hierarchy becomes the criteria for a person to determine whether to trigger his or her moral consciousness and responsibility. In other words, Chinese egocentrism can 'expand to include other related persons, or shrink into a single self, according to the context' (Yeh, 2010, p. 77). A well-known traditional Chinese saying describing the Chinese people's public spirit is, 'Each one sweeps the snow from his own doorstep and doesn't bother about the frost on his neighbor's roof' [Chinese: 各人自扫门前雪, 不管他人瓦上霜].³⁸ The Chinese never deny their tendency of passivity and selfishness towards the marginal or peripheral 'ripples' in their lives; the degree to which the Chinese expand their

³⁸ Regarding this saying, Chinese author Lin Yutang (1936, p. 175) has made the following insightful comment: 'Chinese courtesy cannot be defined... The Chinese people are not bad-mannered toward their friends and acquaintances, but beyond that limit the Chinese as a social being is positively hostile toward his neighbor, be he a fellow-passenger in a street car or a neighbor at the theatre-ticket office.'

benevolence is contingent on the circumstances and their individual preferences, both being neither fixed nor absolute. Fei (2005, pp. 78-79) described the Chinese thought process as follows:

In a society characterized by a differential mode of association, general standards have no utility. The first thing to do is to understand the specific context: Who is the important figure, and what kind of relationship is appropriate with that figure? Only then can one decide the ethical standards to be applied in that context.

Loving only those who are closely related to us and respecting superiors in proportion with their rank has given rise to the different levels and kinds of *renqing* applied in Chinese social life. In other words, 'the degrees of permeation of *renqing* into different orders of relationships varies according to (1) the hierarchical system of social ordering and (2) the varying degree of relationship' (Deng, 2013, p. 144). These two criteria transform into the following concrete behaviours:

(1) One should give more *renqing* to one's superiors and not necessarily care much about one's subordinates.

(2) One naturally gives more *renqing* to those with whom one is intimate (even only nominally) and less to those with whom we have more distant relations (Chang & Holt, 1994, p. 104).

Effects on Chinese face culture

- **The rule of *renqing* emphasises the compelling principles of empathy and reciprocity, which constitute the core values of Chinese face culture.** Specifically, if you want to have face, you also need to be concerned about others' face wants; if you do not want to lose face, you also should not make others lose face. In facework, if I have given you face, you should give me face in turn, and vice versa.
- **Hierarchical inequality and relational closeness (even nominal) are more likely to prompt Chinese people's face-giving behaviours** (see more in Sections 3.6 and 3.7).

3.5.4 Modesty

Let's begin this discussion by reviewing a critical historical fragment. On 21 February 1972, American President Richard Nixon had an unprecedented meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong. Below is an excerpt of their dialogue:³⁹

President Nixon: *He [Dr Kissinger] is an expert in philosophy.*

Dr Kissinger: *I used to assign the Chairman's collective writings to my classes at Harvard.*

Chairman Mao: *Those writings of mine aren't anything. There is nothing instructive in what I wrote.*

³⁹ The dialogue has been sourced from the USC US-China Institute website. (2016, September 24) Mao Zedong Meets Richard Nixon, February 21, 1972. Retrieved from <http://china.usc.edu/mao-zedong-meets-richard-nixon-february-21-1972>.

President Nixon: *The Chairman's writings moved a nation and have changed the world.*

Chairman Mao: *I haven't been able to change it. I've only been able to change a few places in the vicinity of Peking.*

Mao Zedong's response is a very typical Chinese way of showing modesty as well as conducting facework. Obviously, no one would believe that Mao really thought that he was a politician who wrote non-instructive things and was merely able to influence 'a few places in the vicinity of Peking'. In the Chinese mind, this kind of argument only corroborates Mao's moral consciousness in the face of praise.

Modesty, in a general sense, can be defined as 'the public under-representation of one's favorable traits and abilities' (Cialdini et al., 1998, p. 473). Researchers have widely concluded that modesty functions as one of the most dominant cultural norms, affecting how the motivation for self-enhancement manifests among the Chinese (Kim, Cohen, et al., 2010; Kurman & Sriram, 1997; Leung & Cohen, 2011). Chinese modesty is not only a moral virtue but a kind of interpersonal skill and a means to seek recognition. The underlying logic is that by downplaying one's personal qualities and successes and by highlighting one's need to constantly learn, others would view oneself favourably, which would promote interpersonal acceptance, inclusion and harmony (Koh & Wang, 2012, p. 143).

Correspondingly, ignorance about modesty in Chinese society often leads to interpersonal tensions. For example, in Chinese academic circles, if a professor's behaviour shows that he or

she thinks he is knowledgeable, smart and wise, people would think of him or her as a tough character and would not feel comfortable being in their presence or part of their social circle (Matthyseen, 2012, p. 91). Similarly, claiming more recognition than one is granted by others is also considered a violation of the hierarchical system and a disruption of harmony (Lee et al., 2014, p. 317).

Concrete means of showing modesty include (1) self-effacement, which refers to restraining oneself in seeking praise or self-interest; (2) other-enhancement, which refers to showing concern for others and elevating others; (3) avoidance of attention-seeking, which refers to building an appearance that does not draw attention to oneself, such as by wearing bland clothing and minimal accessories.

Self-effacement and other-enhancement are consistently simultaneous with and supplement each other in the Chinese method of showing modesty in one's communication. Early sinologist Chester Holcombe (2001[1895], pp. 260-261) described this behavioural trend as follows:

To a large extent, it [the system of etiquette] deprives conversation of all freshness and originality by dictating a set form through which it may flow, and so covers simple questions between friends with a varnish or lacquer of extravagant adjectives and bombastic nouns, with fulsome compliment and intense but meaningless self-depreciation, as to render it absurd and silly.

Below is an example from my own life. When my classmates and friends discovered that I would be going abroad to study on a four-year scholarship, they expressed their

congratulations to me in the following manner:

My classmate/friend: 'Rui, congratulations! You are so good!'

I: 'Thank you! I'm flattered. I have to say, if you had applied for that scholarship and competed with me, it would have been yours, not mine.'

My classmate/friend: 'You are so modest, and I am incapable of doing that.' Or, 'Are you kidding? How could I possibly compete with you?'

The self-effacement and other-enhancement seen in this example are typical of conversations between Chinese people. Both sides make every attempt to show a deep sense of modesty, while ritualistically redressing the other's self-trivialisation. This kind of interaction was described by Jia Wenshan (1997, p. 50) as follows: 'To Westerners, all these may sound like a false modesty, a waste of time and even funny'; however, such behaviors can be fully understood and proficiently manipulated by most Chinese people, and function as 'an effective means to fulfill the relational needs of each participant in Chinese culture' (Ibid.). According to Brown and Levinson's 'negative face' theory (1987, p. 68), compliments often limit a person's freedom of action, and rejecting others' compliments will cause them a loss of face.⁴⁰ The Chinese do not seem to have such worries, and rejecting a compliment is mandatory and conforms to the Chinese standards of politeness.

⁴⁰ According to Brown and Levinson, when recipients accept a given compliment, they may feel constrained to denigrate the object being complimented, thereby damaging their own positive face desire in order to be liked by others. Complimentees may feel obliged to return the compliment, thus damaging their own negative face needs to act unimpededly (1987, p. 68). In addition, in case of rejection responses, the recipient of the compliment appears to show disagreement in a direct, clear and unambiguous way, thus damaging the positive face needs of the complimenter.

For the Chinese, the highest expression of modesty is avoiding attention-seeking behaviour or, at least, pretending to be indifferent to one's success. Chinese people tend to believe that 'being in a high position—be it social, intellectual or moral—makes you more vulnerable to, for instance, the hatred and malice, jealousy, and slander of others' (Yang, 1945, p. 106). There is an abundance of Chinese sayings that reinforce this belief, such as, 'tall trees catch much wind' [Chinese: 树大招风], 'a man dreads fame as a pig dreads being fat' [Chinese: 人怕出名猪怕壮], 'the outstanding bird usually bears the brunt of the attack' [Chinese: 枪打出头鸟]. Based on the very likely unfortunate consequences of immodesty, 'being smart and possessing a high social position can be a burden, and the only way to protect oneself from this is by staying modest and not showing off, and, in the worst case, pretending not to know or not admitting to having a particularly high social position' (Ibid.). As noted in one Chinese book containing instructions on how to live, 'not unfolding the real self, being in a lower position to get the upper hand—people who put themselves in a low position are the smartest' (Si, 2007). 'Keeping a low profile and achieving something' [Chinese: 韬光养晦, 有所作为]—the diplomatic strategy that China has insisted on for a long time, to a great extent reflects their attitude to life, which involves being content with remaining passive or 'one step back today for two steps forward tomorrow' [Chinese saying: 以退为进].

Based on this viewpoint, this thesis will propose that the overemphasis on modesty in Chinese society leads to a preference for weakness in Chinese facework (see more in Section 3.7.2).

3.5.5 Conformity

Conformity in the sociological sense of the term refers to a tendency of individual members of a group to behave in a manner that agrees with the norms of the group or the expectations of the in-group others (Kent, 2007, p. 97). A long-held view is that conformity to some extent is a product of cultural conditioning and that relatively high levels of conformity can often be found in some national groups (Bond & Smith, 1996, p. 111). According to many empirical studies (e.g. Ibid.; Kramer, et al., 2007, p. 246-258; Hwang & Kim, 2007, pp. 232-248), most people in the Chinese cultural context constantly exhibit the remarkable behavioural characteristic of conformity. Commonly, 'there is an abiding fear of being on one's own, of being separated or disconnected from the group; a desire for independence is cast as unnatural and immature' (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Additionally, in view of the deep-rooted hierarchical culture of China, conformity very often is an expression of compliance with one's superiors.

From the Chinese perspective, as the ultimate goal of interpersonal communication is to pursue harmonious and conflict-free relationships, harmony can be achieved only when people engage in the same code of conduct and sacrifice each individual's uniqueness (cf. Chen, 1998). Confucius made it clear that 'people who have chosen different ways cannot make plans together' [Chinese: 道不同，不相为谋], which means that 'the harmony of a broth is dependent on the condition that no ingredient is sharply at odds with other ingredients' (Ni, 2014, p. 67). In essence, this pursuit of harmony ultimately aims for 'a unity of differences, a synthesis of divergences, a confluence of contrasts' (Young, 1994, p. 45). In this case, the subjective and independent *I* is always seemingly not conspicuous at all, and the dichotomy of the self and the

other is reshaped or dissolved at least at a surface level. If social interaction is seen as a tool for Americans to express their authentic self, the Chinese culture treats communication as a means of 'reaffirming the communicator as a member of society and of showing the common points with the other social actors' (Chang, 1999, p. 536). An empirical study finds that in Chinese home education, 'self-expression or the striving for autonomous behavior on the part of the children are discouraged or suppressed as nothing more than selfishness' (Solomon, 1971, p. 69).

To most Westerners, conformity is considered to be a negative trait. It is widely believed that everyone should be independent and have their own free will, and only when one's ability or power cannot influence others should someone get in line with environmental forces or powerful others (Rothbaum, 1982, p. 5). As Rothbaum points out, conformity is a behaviour intended to passively adapt to the environment (Ibid.). For some theorists, conformity often leads to psychological conflicts or distress in the individual (e.g. Campell, 1975; Bond & Smith, 1996; Mahalik, et al., 2003). In contrast, the Chinese conform with others, groups and norms as a way of securing a sense of social security. 'They actively like to conform in [the] sense of being connected to others, and being connected to others has positive behavioral consequences in this context' (Kim & Markus, 1999, p. 786).

It is also worth noting that Chinese conformity is very practical and flexible, very often nothing more than superficial conformity or compliance without internalisation (King & Bond, 1985, p. 35). A common saying aptly illustrates this Chinese characteristic: 'See a man, talk human words; see a ghost, speak ghost language' [Chinese: 见人说人话, 见鬼说鬼话]. As noted by Wu

and Tseng (1998, p. 9), 'if one accepts this superficial conformity to sociocultural norms of conduct as a prevailing force in shaping Chinese perception and behavior in social interaction, it is not surprising that many social and political movements aimed at making fundamental changes in mainland Chinese society have not worked'. Moreover, Chinese people are not subject to the same pressure to ensure consistency between one's inner beliefs and one's external behaviour as Westerners (Hiniker, 1969). For the Chinese, the maintenance or manipulation of such a discrepancy is just a rational way of life, which can bring about not only interpersonal harmony but also help achieve practical interests. As long as surface conformity can fulfil the task of promoting and maintaining relationships (especially hierarchal relationships), there is no moral or psychological pressure.

For example, once my father took me to a dinner with his friends. During the dinner, he and his friends discussed a controversial domestic political issue. I agreed with his friend and also presented a 'challenging' opinion. At that moment, my father kept silent, but on leaving the dinner, he got angry with me: 'Do you realise you make me lose face? We are father and son and, undoubtedly, should be in the same camp. You can have your own ideas in your heart, but in front of others you should stay on my side. If you cannot, at least keep quiet!' Fei Xiaotong (2005, p. 116) notes that the 'Chinese face is a kind of superficial obedience... Name and substance, speech and practice, discourse and thing, theory and reality, all can be separated'. Obviously, what my father required was merely 'superficial obedience' in that situation rather than the actual acknowledgement of his viewpoint. I did fail to do what Fei says (Ibid.)—conform to my parent's will while maintaining individual duplicity.

It follows that in interpersonal communication, Chinese people generally believe that it is more possible to establish and maintain a good relationship with those who are similar to them in some aspects. Concretely, similarity is believed to be helpful for '(1) establishing or enhancing interpersonal harmony; (2) preventing conflicts or reducing harmony-threatening activities' (Wei & Li, 2013, p. 62). There are many popular Chinese idioms revealing this preference: one essential condition of becoming friends should be 'cherish[ing] the same ideals and follow[ing] the same path [Chinese: 志同道合]; the best marriage is with one's own kind of person, especially 'from an equal position on the social ladder [Chinese: 门当户对]. When two Chinese lovers have to separate or end a marriage, the most commonly blamed reason (or, maybe, excuse) is that 'we two have different personalities' [Chinese: 个性不合]. For most people, this difference could justify any interpersonal clashes as well as the decision to end their relationship. The 'fellow complex' mentioned above is also a reflection of this mentality. Just because two persons are from the same or nearby places, the Chinese conclude that this point of similarity means that they must have a lot more in common (especially dietary habits, characteristics and temperament and are therefore more likely to establish a close relationship with each other.

This study believes that the Chinese rely on interpersonal similarities when engaging in facework; in other words, face can be gained and saved more easily by seeking similarities in others or, perhaps, by becoming similar to others (see more in Section 3.7.2).

3.6 Models of Chinese Facework: Dependence on Self-Presentation to Relationship

Based on deep-rooted Chinese cultural origins and many comparisons between Western and Eastern behavioural tendencies, I present in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 two models of facework⁴¹—the Western and the Chinese models of facework. The two models are based on a generalisation the cultural tendencies and behaviours of these two regions. They certainly cannot cover every individual case; they serve to show an overall trend of the majority of people from these two parts of the world.

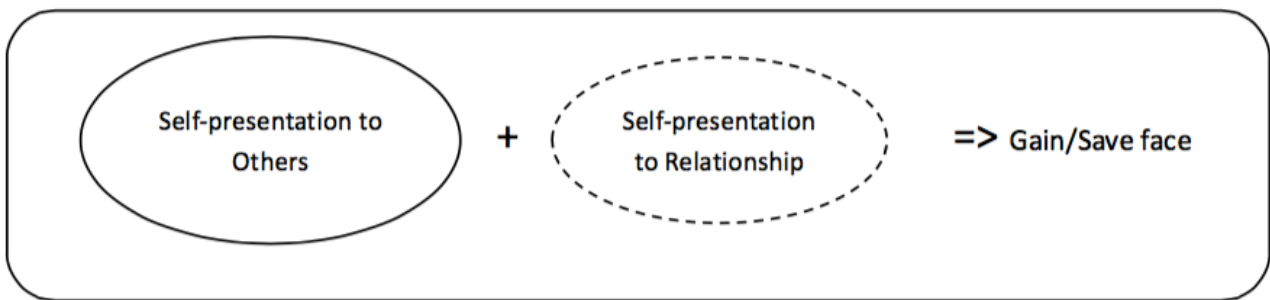


Figure 3.3 The Western Model of Facework

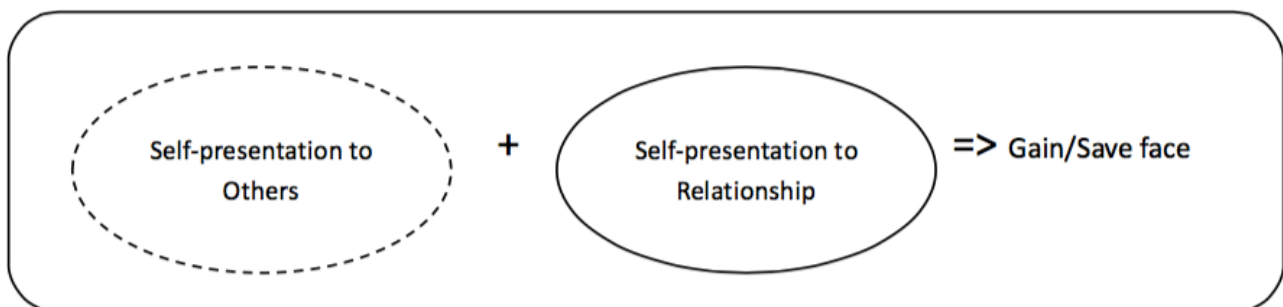


Figure 3.4. The Chinese model of facework.

The dotted line represents a non-essential step; the solid line represents an essential step.

⁴¹ The two models are based on a generalisation of the cultural tendencies and behaviours of these two regions. They certainly cannot cover every individual case but can show an overall trend of the majority of people.

The two graphs reveal the basic difference between facework or the struggle for social recognition between China and the West: in the West, facework is largely determined by one's own self-presentation to others; in China, facework largely relies on self-expression in a relationship. In fact, it can be seen that many scholars have previously demonstrated this cultural disparity. Chang and Holt (1994, pp. 126-127) claim,

[The] Western understanding of facework is very much influenced by the idea of impression management, reflecting the dominant individualistic value characteristics of Western cultures. This can be contrasted with the Chinese conception of face which places more emphasis on the nature of the relationship.

The Western model essentially reflects the notion of individualism, namely, 'a conception of the self as an autonomous, independent, and unique person' (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). The gain or loss of face is primarily the result of a person's individual behaviours or qualities, and facework should aim 'to satisfy others' expectations' first. As Lu (2014, pp. 510-511) notes, 'under the influence of individualism, westerners tend to achieve recognition of self-image through autonomous behavior, self-realization and personal development. The concept of equality is throughout various kinds of social relations, and all the aspects in facework, more often, are on an equal footing'.

On China's part, a greater emphasis is placed on relationships among individuals than on individuals themselves. The core cultural norm of facework aims to achieve, foster and present

interdependence with one's audience (Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 526). Simply put, when a relationship is dealt with well, face would be in place. It should be noted that this model does not mean that Chinese people ignore the role of self-presentation to others. For the Chinese, if a person has good self-presentation to others but fails to shape or maintain a favourable relationship with his or her audience, it is difficult to gain a fully-recognised and long-sustained face, and even the face gained is very vulnerable and can be easily lost. However, if a person has unsuccessful self-presentation to others but successful self-presentation to relationship, it is still highly possible that he or she can gain face.

With regard to self-presentation to relationship in China, this thesis proposes the following two behavioural patterns of Chinese face culture:

Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.

Behavioural pattern II: When one perceives oneself at the same or at an inferior status in an interaction, one tends to present oneself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart in order to seek recognition.

The above arguments can be depicted as the flow chart presented in Figure 3.5:

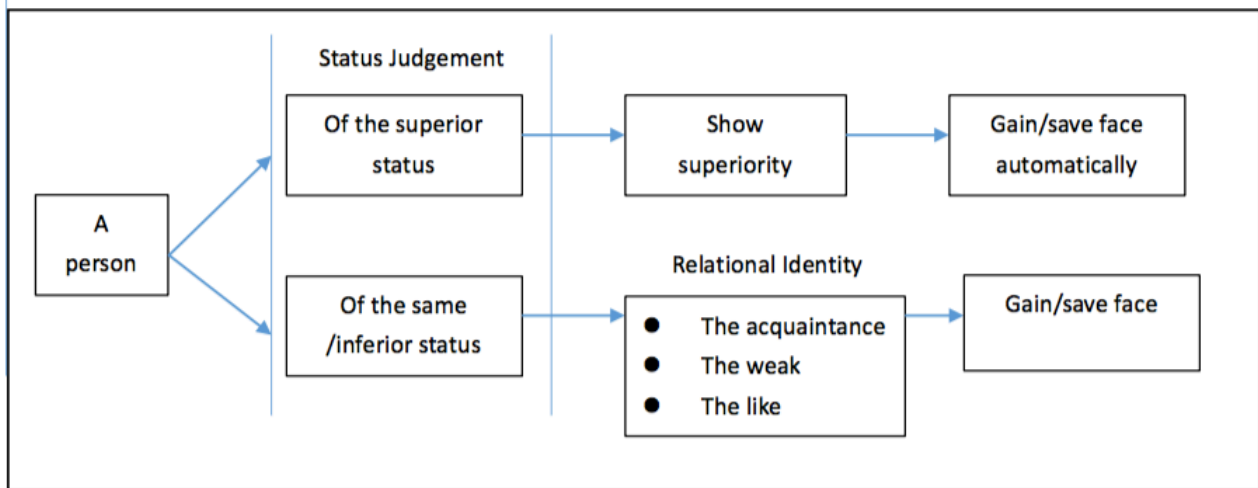


Figure 3.5. Chinese behavioural patterns of self-presentation in relationships

Figure 3.5 shows that the first step in presentation in a relationship is ‘status judgment’, in which a person determines his or her own status compared with the other party. After this step, he or she can adopt different behavioural patterns or project a specific identity to seek or save face. The author believes that both behavioural patterns and relevant identities embody the cultural origins of face culture, coexist remarkably in Chinese facework and are verifiable through empirical research. Certainly, these two patterns also fully reflect the characteristics of self-presentation to relationship i.e. seeking recognition by taking the initiative to define, and make the relationship more intimate.

3.7 Two Behavioural Patterns

3.7.1 Behavioural pattern I: Showing superiority

Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.

Behavioural pattern I can be intuited immediately by most people aware of Chinese face culture. Specifically, a person, no matter what position he or she occupies in an interaction (superior or inferior), always endeavours to highlight or even exaggerate his or her superiority. Such behaviour is expected to help confirm, magnify or balance the asymmetry of the relationship so that face can be gained or saved.

In Chinese society, superiors are endowed with the legitimacy to gain face from their subordinates, and subordinates generally believe that it is their duty as well as a virtue to give face to superiors, no matter what kind of self-presentation they engage in with others (Lim, 1994, p. 219; Chang & Holtt, 1994, p. 119; Wei & Li, 2013, p. 64). In this sense, face is the primary Chinese social ideology that legitimatises pre-existing hierarchical rectitude. As seen in Figure 3.5, when a person is in the superior status during an interaction, he or she just needs to show the superiority, the claimed face can be acknowledged or saved automatically.

Moreover, the cultural norm is that 'the higher the relative position one occupies, the better one's ability to claim face' (Chang & Holtt, 1994, p. 119). Hwang regards this behavioural model as Chinese 'procedural justice' (Hwang, 2011, p. 99). What needs to be added is that Chinese people also emphasise compliance with the rule of *renqing* i.e. the superior should also express their concern about the subordinate's face-wants. Only through this and by following the principle of reciprocity can the superior maintain face.

An equal or inferior person in an interaction can still emphasise or even overstate his or her importance, value and status. Such behaviours are obviously aimed to forge a sense of balance

or closeness in the relationship, to draw the other's attention, to change the existing cognition of their relational asymmetry and to seek recognition. Most often, such efforts do not alter the superior-inferior distribution in a relationship, but it is indeed possible to reduce the perceived disparity of rank and to refresh the interactants' understanding of their relationship.

In social life, there are a variety of concrete methods to show (off) a person's superiority, including adherence to a hierarchical system, employing a discursive strategy to flaunt oneself, conspicuous consumption, certain ritualised behaviours etc. Certainly, these behaviours must not be exclusive to the Chinese.

3.7.2 Behavioural pattern II: Present as acquaintance, weak and counterpart

Behavioural pattern II: When one perceives oneself at the same or at an inferior status in an interaction, one tends to present oneself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart in order to seek recognition.

This pattern reveals an alternate behavioural strategy that is usually adopted by Chinese people but easily overlooked by observers. When engaging in facework, when one is at the same or at an inferior status compared with one's audience, one tends to show some arresting identities to construct/reconstruct the characteristics of the relationship.

Having uncovered the cultural origins of Chinese face culture, this thesis proposes three relational identities that dominate Chinese self-presentation in relationships when engaging in facework, especially when the actor's status is inferior to the other's. Chinese people believe

that public image and behaviour derived from these three identities could effectively close the gap between them and those who are superior to them, can help cultivate a good relationship and, finally, help one gain face as expected. Three points should be noted here:

1) All of these identities are not necessarily based on one's actual power or status and are sometimes only based on one's preferences regarding or expectations from the relationship.

2) These three identity preferences all embody the rule of *renqing*, namely, presuming that the rules of empathy and reciprocity prevail in all humans.

3) Many behaviours stemming from these three identities are in fact only 'front stage behaviours', as Goffman (1959) proposed, only intended to create specific impressions in the minds of others and with a distinct dramatic colour.

The acquaintance [熟人].

'For the acquaintance's face, just give you/me a face.'

This common Chinese saying shows that the identity of an acquaintance is a useful 'voucher' to exchange and gain face. According to *renqing*, to acknowledge the face of another is in effect the distribution of *renqing* to the other. As one should give more *renqing* to those with whom one is more intimate (even only nominally), it is logical and appropriate to actively give face to acquaintances. Just as Hsiang (1974, p. 103] observes, 'there is no way to talk about *renqing*

between strangers. To work for our acquaintances, to give them face, and to make them happy, is so-called *renqing*'. In other words, if one cannot be categorised as an acquaintance, there must be little to no *renqing* involved, and it will be difficult for one to claim face in the presence of this person.

In English, *acquaintance* refers to a relationship less intimate than friendship. In Chinese, *acquaintance* or 熟人[shuren] literally means *familiar person*, which can be applicable for anyone you want to bring into your own circle and to indicate intimacy with. For the Chinese, a family member, a lover, a friend, a colleague, a classmate and all of one's fellow townsmen can be regarded as acquaintances. Even two persons who have met only once can refer to each other as 'an acquaintance' to others or when meeting for the second time.

Based on Fei Xiaotong's theory of *Manners of Different Orders*, sociologist Ye Zhengtao (2013, pp. 370-371) proposes the concept of *Chinese individual social network*. There are two kinds of complementary social categories that have a distinct effect on Chinese pragmatic acts and interactional styles: One is the pair 生人[stranger] and 熟人[acquaintance], and the other is the pair 自己人[insider] and 外人[outsider]. As shown in Figure 3.6, the *Insider* category constitutes the central figure's immediate inner circle, *Acquaintance* constitutes the next intermediate ring and *Stranger* occupies the outer or peripheral circle and is farthest from the central figure. By default, one's kin (particularly those with whom one has a blood relationship) are regarded as *Insiders* and non-kin as *Outsiders*. Consequently, outside one's family, one can be thought of as either a stranger or an acquaintance to the central figure. It can be found that the boundaries of the *Chinese relation network* are highly elastic in the sense that they can be

expanded or contracted depending on the central figure's preference.

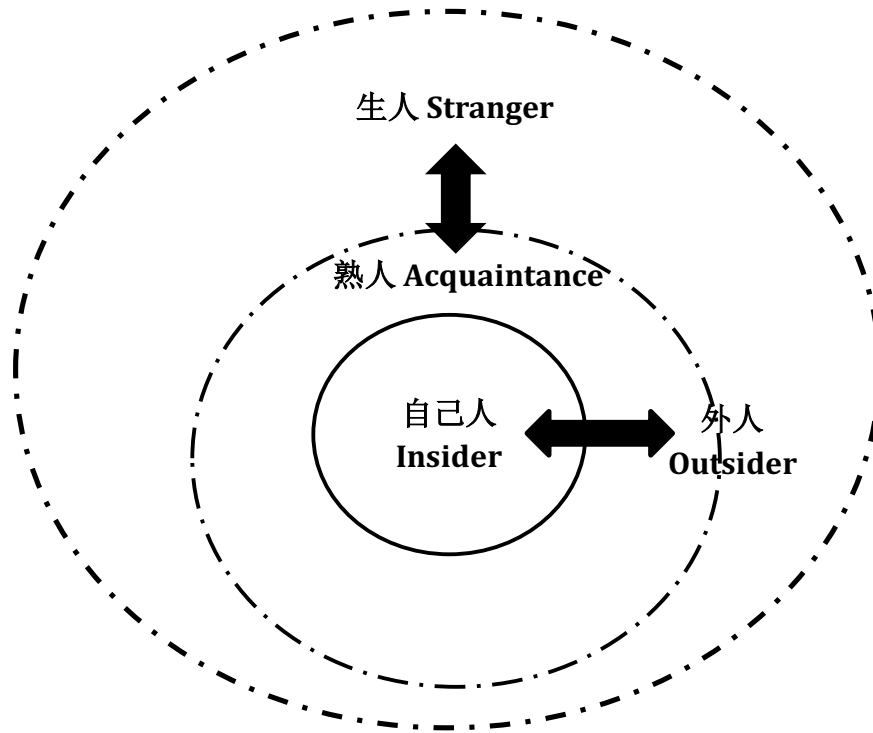


Figure 3.6. Chinese social categories (Ye, 2013, p. 371)

This may seem to be a paradox to many foreigners.⁴² These categorisations intentionally maintain relational ambiguity and flexibility. Matthyseen (2012, p. 94) claims, ‘on the one hand there is the strong emphasis on strict hierarchical roles and well-defined rules of behaviour that also govern how people of different status within their relationships should address and interact with one another, while on the other hand, there is the Chinese verbal style often described as indirect, imprecise and ambiguous’. An old saying goes, ‘when the water is too

⁴² Nisbett et al. (2001, pp. 291-300), an empirical study in the field of comparative social psychology, reveals that compared with Westerners who focus primarily on the object and rule-based categories to which they belong, the Chinese are less likely to use formal rules to construct categories and draw inferences from them.

clear, there will be no fish; when people are too scrutinising, they will not have followers' [Chinese: 水至清则无鱼, 人至察则无徒]. The pursuit of vagueness or suggestiveness is necessary to maintain interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture—at the very least, to show a superficially friendly attitude towards others while also leaving plenty of room for the relationship to develop in various ways.

One important way in which the Chinese enact the identity of an acquaintance is by addressing others using intimate titles, family salutations and other terms of kinship. When two Chinese persons meet for the first time, they habitually ask each other's age and then call each other 'Brother' [哥/弟] or 'Sister' [姐/妹] if they are younger. If they are much older, it is common to address this person as 'Uncle' [叔] or 'Aunt' [姨]. In school or university, upperclassman and women are normally addressed as 'Academic senior brother' [学长/师兄] or 'Academic senior sister' [学姐/师姐] by younger students. Correspondingly, the younger ones are addressed as 'Academic younger brother' or 'Academic younger sister'. Students often address their teachers, including the female teachers, as 'Academic father' [师父]. More interestingly, male teachers' wives are addressed as 'Academic mother' as a sign of respect. Similar rules also apply in the workplace. For example, I worked in a real estate company in Beijing for three years. Throughout my time there, I addressed my direct superior—a young lady who was four years older than me—as 'Sister Bai Yu'. When I had been there three years, the newcomers also addressed me as 'Brother Rui' from the very first day we met. In my own experience, such terms indeed increase intimacy among colleagues in a short period of time, and in the long term always remind everyone to give or save face for their work " and 'sisters'. In addition,

friend, partner, neighbour and many other terms of endearment and closeness are often used by Chinese people to address those from whom they need to seek face, although sometimes these terms don't necessarily reflect the actual nature of their relationship.

The weak [弱者].

As mentioned above, modesty constitutes an important cultural basis of Chinese face culture. Undoubtedly, modesty is not the equivalent of showing weakness but an overemphasis on modesty leads to the weak becoming accustomed to this thinking pattern as a way to seek and save face.

The representation of 'the weak' in Chinese society first of all manifests as 'being proactive to expose my limitations' (Lee, et al., 2014, p. 318). The implied logic behind this behaviour is that 'as one cannot evaluate his or her strength correctly and also cannot predict the consequence of action correctly in communication, it must be a wise move to demean oneself firstly. In this way, one can lower others' expectations of him/herself, meanwhile establishing a humble image to gain more praise' (Lu, 2014, p. 510). In this sense, Chinese facework is sometimes a kind of bi-directional mental activity and behaviour, in which Chinese people conceal themselves while also showing themselves off.

A typical case is as follows: The Chinese will often invite their friends home for dinner. When having dinner with a Chinese family, you will find that the host always says things like, 'We are sorry for not preparing good food today. Hope you don't mind', or, 'My cooking is very bad.

Please forgive me and give me face by having some', even if in reality you have been offered a lot of delicious food. Such sayings have seemed to become a ritual configuration for all Chinese hosts at such occasions. The goal of promoting and protecting face by saying such things is very clear: if the banquet is very good and meets the guest's expectations, the hosts will certainly receive more praise and face not only for their cooking but also for their virtue of humility; if the food is indeed bad or is not as per the guest's taste, since the host has already acknowledged its weakness, the guest will not have the heart to complain and make the host lose face. A similar practice can be seen when Chinese people need to give a public performance. The performer will often say things like, 'Just show my incompetence' [Chinese: 献丑] at the start and 'Please do not laugh at my performance' [Chinese: 见笑] at the end. Another behavioural trend of the weak, which has been mentioned in Section 3.5.4, is to extol others while demeaning oneself. My own experience mentioned in Section 3.5.4 has fully demonstrated this behavioural model.

In addition, giving a rejection response in response to a compliment is another common way in which the Chinese show the identity of the weak. In fact, from the Western academic perspective, such behaviour is mostly meaningless, as disagreeing with the complimenter will inevitably threaten both sides' face needs (Brown & Levison, 1987, p. 178). Conversely, for the Chinese, this behaviour is not a real rejection of the compliment but only a performance of humility and self-abasement in order to abide by cultural norms. In this way, complimentees can receive greater acknowledgement by demonstrating their knowledge of Chinese face, and complimenters feel their face has been enhanced as they recognise that the complimentee is

being polite and respectful (Yu, 2003, p. 1702). A typical example of this behaviour has been presented in Section 3.5.4.

The counterpart [同类].

Based on the culture of conformity, the identity of the counterpart is salient in Chinese facework. *Counterpart* here refers to a person having the same function or characteristics as another. Just like the conceptualisation of *acquaintance*, the Chinese understanding of *counterpart* is very broad and ambiguous. In daily life, any common point between or among two or more people can become the basis for a sense of identification and similarity, which then becomes a reliable foundation for relational improvement and face-giving behaviour. The implied behavioural logic of adopting the identity of the counterpart is that because we are similar (or the same), giving me face is the same as giving face to yourself, and making me lose face is equivalent to making yourself lose face.

Fellow is a typical example of this in Chinese society. *Fellow* [Chinese: 同乡/老乡] is a term that describes someone who comes from the same place as you and can also be termed *fellow-townsmen* or *fellow-villager* in English. The Chinese generally believe that human beings are shaped by the environment in which they grew up and live in.⁴³ Consequently, persons from the same place must have a lot in common and deserve each other's trust and recognition,

⁴³ This idea is particularly reflected in the following well-known Chinese proverb: 'The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants' [Chinese: 一方水土养一方人].

especially when meeting outside their hometown. Usually, in the first such meeting, 'the Chinese may start establishing a connection with a stranger by seeking information of their township' (Wei & Li, 2013, p. 65). When they discover that the other person is from the same place (village, town, city or province), the relationship of *fellows* will be immediately established and facework will also become easier. In Chinese universities, there are many such *fellow-townsmen* organisations, most of which operate at the provincial level.⁴⁴ Students often seek help from, organise entertainment activities with and find jobs through their *fellow* clubs, and relationships established in these campus organisations can continue long after graduation.

Throughout history, any nation that has identified with Confucianism can be regarded as similar to China. Even today, many Chinese people in China are somewhat obsessed with Singapore, whose largest ethnic group comprises ethnic Chinese who believe that Singapore should always be on China's side and give face to the country automatically, just because it has the same origin.

One way to identify someone as a *counterpart* is to begin by seeking and highlighting shared traits and similarities. This is in fact a widely adopted method of communication in human society. The other main way to do so is to conceal one's personality or ideas. 'Hiding personality and not highlighting individual differences is the core behaviour of Chinese conformity' (Di, 2006, p. 81). For the Chinese, this method, at the very least, reduces the

⁴⁴ There are 23 provinces, five ethnic autonomous regions, four municipalities and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macao) in the current PRC. All of them are provincial-level administrative units.

possibility of contradiction or conflict as well as the possibility of losing face. For example, in Chinese schools and universities, students seldom question their teachers or schoolmates directly even when they disagree with what they are told in class. As a Chinese student myself, I believe that if the other students have no problem and only I stand up to ask questions, it will make me seem too special, aggressive or even annoying. From the perspective of facework, a directly posed question can make a teacher lose face if he or she does not have a good answer. Also, if the question itself is 'stupid' or boring, it will also make the student asking the question lose face. At least on the surface, keeping silent can be a way of showing respect and identification to others, which is believed to maintain the face of everyone involved. Consequently, from an early age, Chinese people realise that it is better to 'work under the table to exchange less-than-kind messages' (Chang, 2001, p. 159).

3.8 Core Assumptions of this Study

The discussion in Chapter 3 has revealed that face culture constitutes a kind of behavioural logic and moral reference for the Chinese in their efforts to gain social recognition. The three key points mentioned below will be explained in detail in the next chapter:

- *Face* refers to the public image that a person claims for him/herself and is also recognised by others.
- Face is a collective rather than individual concept for the Chinese.
- Chinese people emphasise the role of self-presentation to relationship in gaining and

saving face. This manifests through two common behavioural patterns:

- Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.
- Behavioural pattern II: When one perceives oneself as having the same or inferior status in an interaction, one tends to present oneself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart in order to seek recognition.

Many studies from the field of social psychology have revealed that face is a universal theme of Chinese organisational behaviour or group activity (e.g. Ting-Toomy, 1994; Lee, 1998; Chen & Farth, 2010). Anecdotal evidence suggests that facework is a powerful consideration even for powerful Chinese decision-makers (Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 522). Consequently, China as a state is surely worthy of being the object of research with regard to its face culture. *State* here is not only 'a political community characterised by a particular culture' but also 'a political community by virtue of its possession of a particular culture' (Lawson, 2006, p. 3). In this sense, China's face diplomacy is virtually 'giving expression externally to the same principles of social and political order that are manifested internally within Chinese society' (Liao, 2013, p. 44). In sum, the behavioural model at the personal level can be used to understand the behaviour at the level of state.

In this research, the two behaviour patterns mentioned above have been extrapolated to arrive at the following two assumptions about China's diplomatic behaviours aimed at achieving international recognition:

- Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.
- Behavioural pattern II: When China perceives itself as being an equal or inferior in an interaction, it tends to present itself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart in order to seek international recognition.

According to the theoretical analysis framework introduced in Section 2.5.2, these assumptions can be depicted in terms of role theory.

This study aims to further investigate to what degree and how face culture as a source of role conception has translated into China's role performances in its diplomatic discourse and observable actions.

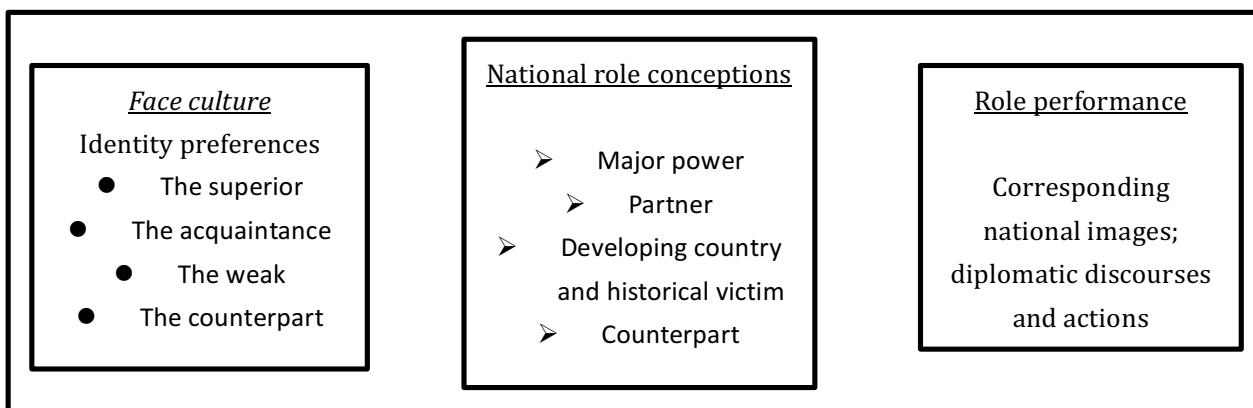


Figure 3.7. Theoretical framework of this research.

Chapter 4

Behavioural Pattern 1: Self-Declared Major Power

大邦者下流，天下之牝，天下之交也

—老子

*'A large state should be like the lower reaches of a river,
with the frailty of a woman, where all rivers meet.'*

—Lao Zi

It is generally known that being recognised as a 'major power' is very important to the PRC. Whenever Chinese authorities pursue such recognition or silence any public mentions of their shortcomings or pour considerable resources into creating a positive image, a major motivation behind such actions is China's traditional face culture. There even exists a specific term—'face diplomacy' [Chinese: 面子外交]—that is widely mentioned in academic literature and political comments. Meanwhile, face culture has increasingly acquired a bad reputation both domestically and internationally, as it is often blamed for the Chinese diplomacy's irrational, emotional and pretentious actions.

The cultural analysis in Chapter 3 has proposed that there are two behavioural models of

Chinese facework that manifest as self-presentation to relationship. The first one is:

Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.

In this study, it is assumed that such behavioural patterns coherently exist in China's diplomatic activities:

Behavioural pattern I: China tends to perform the role conception of a major power to seek international recognition.

This chapter will explore, under the influence of face culture, whether and how China presents itself as a major power in order to seek international recognition. According to the theoretical framework of role theory, this chapter will prove whether *major power* as a national role conception exists in China's diplomacy in its search for international recognition. What kinds of role performance in terms of face culture can confirm this role conception? It is a self-evident fact that China's motivation for and endeavours to be acknowledged as a major power have not been triggered only by face concern. This means that an investigation of this topic should take into account other factors that work together with face culture in China's struggle for recognition.

To answer the above questions, this chapter proceeds as follows: The first part (Section 4.1) introduces the research method of meta-aggregation and its applications in this chapter. The second part (Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) elaborates on and analyses data collected from three different sources—interviews with Chinese diplomats, public opinion found online and

international media reports. The third part (Section 4.5) synthesises all the observations and opinions and presents some clear conclusions.

4.1 Research Method and Data Sources

4.1.1 Introduction of Meta-aggregation

Meta-aggregation is an evidence-orientated qualitative approach, whose aim is to identify, critically evaluate and summarise all the research materials (e.g. empirical evidence, existing research, interview records, quantitative data etc.) on a given subject (Korhonen, et al., 2013, p. 1027; Pearson, 2004, p. 45). This method is 'inspired by the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, who developed, respectively, the philosophy of pragmatism' (Hannes & Pearson, 2011, p. 2). Currently, it is commonly employed in many fields of social science, especially health care study and public policy research.

The advantages of this method, according to Hannes and Pearson (2011, pp. 2-19) as well as my own understanding include the following:

- To ensure that qualitative research follows an empirical path and to reduce the researcher's subjective tendencies to a certain extent.
- To integrate research materials from different sources, and summarise the prominent features of the research object by balancing common and competing findings.
- To emphasise the utility of the research outcomes for practitioners and policy makers.

The main reason I adopt meta-aggregation for this study is that, first, the empirical evidence on how face culture influences China's struggle for international recognition needs to be systematically reviewed. Meta-aggregation can provide a clear and balanced research framework for dealing with various pieces of evidence. Second, the wide range of characteristics and processes intrinsic in China's diplomacy, being situated at different levels of analysis, justify the use of this semi-ecological method in the manifestation of cultural influences. Following the logic of meta-aggregation, this research will mainly focus on micro-level diplomatic participants and observers as well as the meso-level acts of state, both of which are in turn part of a broader macro-level social context associated with political systems and cultural values.

Based on common practices, the basic process of meta-aggregation can be divided into the following four steps (Hannes & Pearson, 2011; Pearson, 2004):

1. Problem statement: To clarify the research problems.
2. Search for related research materials: The entire search process should be guided by formulated questions.
3. Critical appraisal: According to certain inclusion standards (mainly the topic's relevance and the outcome of interest), to select the appropriate materials from those previously collected.
4. Analytical process:
 - 1) Extracting findings from the research material.

- 2) Categorising findings: Categories are to be merged on the basis of conceptual and descriptive similarities of the findings.
- 3) Synthesised statements: To review all the developed categories and identify sufficient similarities to generate a comprehensive set of synthesised conclusions.

This study has been designed in line with the above steps—the steps adopted in this study are presented in Figure 4.1.

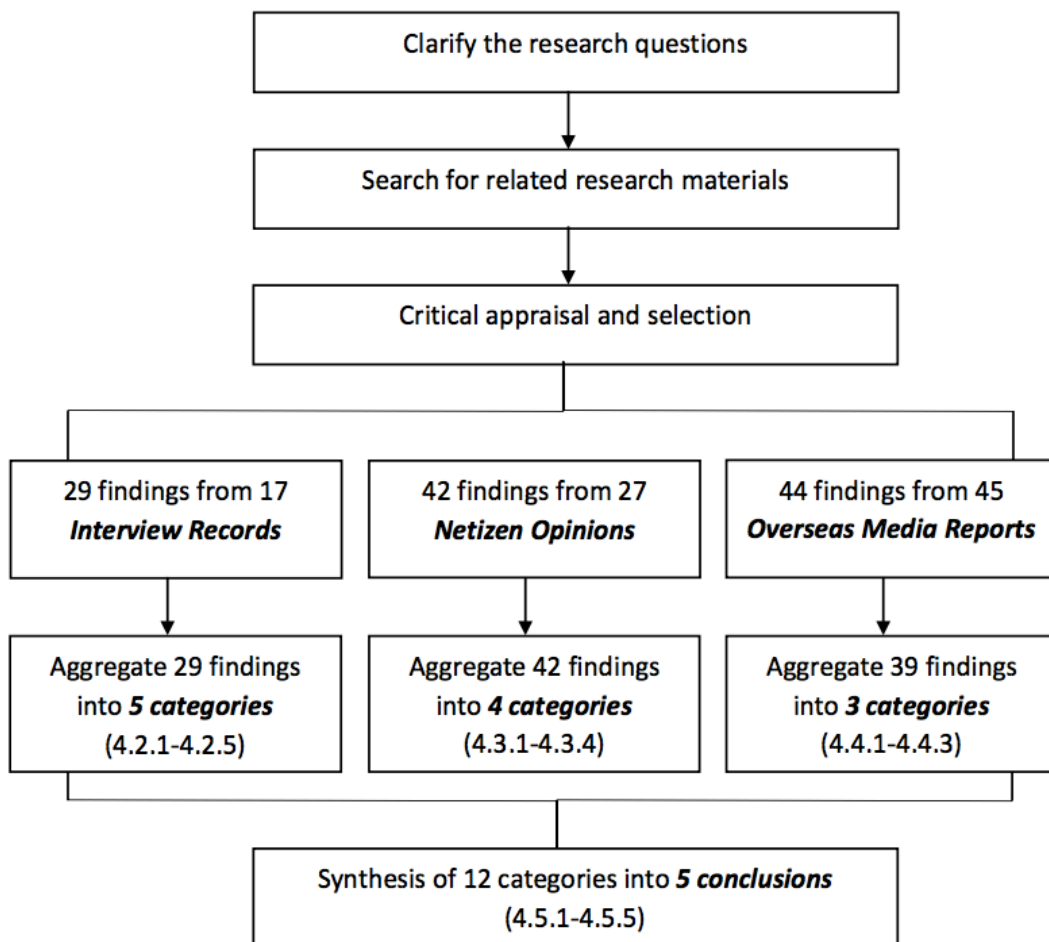


Figure 4.1. The meta-aggregation steps of this study.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This chart refers to *The Joanna Briggs Institute System for the Unified Management, Assessment and Review of Information* (Joana Briggs Institute, 2007).

4.1.2 Data sources.

It is necessary to explain the data sources of this research. Researchers who explore Chinese diplomacy often complain that reliable evidence or primary data is difficult to collect, as most of the Chinese policy decision-making processes are kept a secret. What's worse is that China's decision-makers and diplomats seldom explicate the true purpose behind their foreign policy to the public and neither do they give interviews to the domestic or international media.⁴⁶ In addition, by and large, China's diplomatic discourse is sometimes characterised as lacking substantial content. Given these facts, for many Western scholars, one of the most common practices is to scrutinise their Chinese counterparts' academic works and to search for possible clues.⁴⁷ However, what they ignore intentionally or unintentionally is that Chinese academia in general has limited connections with or influences on diplomatic practitioners.

In order to arrive at an authentic conclusion, this study tries to open and reveal the black box of China's diplomacy as much as possible and to collect research materials from the following three multi-group and multi-channel sources:

1. Interviews with Chinese diplomats

Those who are best qualified to comment on my topic of research are Chinese diplomats—the

⁴⁶ In recent years, this situation has improved to some extent. For example, in early 2014, Chinese diplomats around the world actively published articles on or accepted interviews from foreign media channels, in order to explain China's position on the Diaoyu Island dispute to the world.

⁴⁷ A typical work is David Shambaugh's *Coping with a Conflicted China*.

actual practitioners of Chinese diplomacy. Diplomats are not only representatives of their states but also defenders and performers of national role conceptions and cultural elements. All of their experiences, feelings, observations and thoughts can be considered the most reliable findings that can help determine the influence of face culture.

During February and March 2016, I tried to contact 32 diplomats in China's Foreign Affairs System [外事系统], of whom 17 agreed to an interview. Two things should be explained in this regard. First, given the socialist Party-State political system, the PRC's diplomacy is never exclusive to the Central Government or the Foreign Ministry. The highest decision-making power is in the hands of the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group that is affiliated with the Central Committee of the CCP, and the leader of this powerful group is always the General Secretary of the CPC. The concrete affairs are dealt with by the multiple government and Party agencies including the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the Commerce Ministry, the Defence Ministry, the State Security Ministry, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the International Department of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Affairs Offices at the provincial level.⁴⁸ All of these departments, in Chinese political parlance, belong to the Foreign Affairs System, in which all of my interviewees work. Second, there is some difficulty in conducting academic interviews with Chinese diplomats. Due to the confidentiality and seriousness of their work, it is no surprise that nearly half the diplomats I contacted rejected my invitation politely, quickly and decisively. Even among those who accepted my request and

⁴⁸ See more, Yang, J. (2014). *China's Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. Hackensack: World Scientific; Cabestan, J. P. (2009). China's foreign-and security-policy decision-making processes under Hu Jintao. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 38(3), 63-97.

were assured of anonymity, some still cherished their words such as if they were gold, constantly saying things like, 'sorry, this is as much as I can say' during the interview process. I can fully understand their worries and, understandably, no one would like to assume any possible political risk when discussing 'the real China' rather than 'the official China'. In spite of this, the obtained data are still valuable and unique in the sense that such interviews with Chinese diplomats have, to my knowledge, rarely been conducted as part of academic research.

More than two-thirds of the interviews were conducted face to face in Beijing, while the rest were conducted via telephone or the app *Wechat*. Due to the abstract nature of my research topic, the interviews were semi-structured, meaning that there were some basic questions but also 'a great deal of room for the respondents to elaborate and choose directions themselves' (Elgström, 2007, p. 953). The average time per interview was around 30 minutes.

2. Online public opinions

Many studies published in the last two decades have proved that the Chinese public opinion has played a discernable role in shaping major political outcomes, especially in the sphere of diplomacy (Alan, 1996; Gries, 2004; James, 2013; Salmenkari, 2013; Zhang, 2006). This is firstly because of the CCP's concern for its regime's legitimacy. A host of realities have clearly shown that Chinese leaders have the sober consciousness and sufficient capability of responding to domestic demands and of making their power more legitimate in the eyes of the Chinese public and the outside world. It is universally acknowledged that in the past few

decades, the Chinese regime has succeeded in retaining authority through nationalism and performance-based legitimacy (Holbig & Gilley, 2010, p. 6; Roskin, 2009, p. 426). Second, China's reform and opening up process that began in 1978 enabled the Chinese to learn more about international affairs than ever before, get access to a wide range of information about China's external performance and also to have the freedom to express their independent political opinions through various types of media platforms, especially the Internet. These transformations contributed to the fact that the Chinese public opinion figures prominently in the formulation of China's national role conception. Today, Chinese people as a whole have become indispensable participants engaging with China's diplomatic affairs.

The Internet in general and social media in particular is the most important platform for Chinese people to express their political viewpoints. Owing to the anonymity offered by the Internet, voices heard online are believed to be more credible than those heard on China's television, radio, newspapers and magazines, which usually have to serve as a 'mouthpiece of the Party'.⁴⁹ Certainly, the Chinese authorities have kept the reins tight on online media. As argued in *Freedom House* (2016), the government 'has developed the world's most sophisticated and multilayered apparatus for censoring, monitoring, and manipulating online content'. Suffice to say, since the political turmoil in 1989, it operates as per the rules of social

⁴⁹ In the eyes of Westerners, China is home to the world's most restrictive media environment. 'The CCP maintains direct control over news coverage through its Central Propaganda Department and corresponding branches at lower administrative levels that determine the boundaries of permissible reporting' (Freedom House, 2015). See also, for example, Sun, X., & Michel, E. C. (2001). *An Orchestra of Voices: Making the Argument for Greater Speech and Press Freedom in the People's Republic of China*. Greenwood Publishing Group; King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(02), 326-343.

management—do not jeopardise social stability, do not organise offline demonstrations or protests and do not threaten the CCP's ruling (*The Economist*, 2013). In this case, opinions about China's diplomacy are more likely to be accepted or tolerated by the censor authorities, especially compared with those about domestic politics.

The Chinese public opinions presented in this study are a collection of comments found on some of China's most popular social networking sites. They include messages posted on *Sina Weibo*, a Chinese microblogging website akin to Twitter; blogs from *Sina Blog*; posts on *Tianya Club*, *Tiexue Forum*, *Qiangguo Forum* and some other online communities.⁵⁰ A few articles on online news outlets were also investigated. Although some foreign observers argue that some of the above sites have their respective political orientations,⁵¹ the author is quite sure that various political opinions can be found on all of the online communities cited. From the numerous pages that involve the key words 'face' [面子] and 'Chinese diplomacy' [中国外交], I collected 243 comments by netizens and, after a critical analysis, used 27 of them for in-depth research.

⁵⁰ Some basic information about these websites: *Sina Weibo* and *Sina Blog* are owned and operated by Sina Corporation, a Chinese online media company. By September 2015, the number of MAU (monthly active users) on *Sina Weibo* had reached 212 million (<http://data.weibo.com/report/reportDetail?id=297>). Due to the enormous influence of this Chinese version of Twitter, a majority of the departments of the CCP and the government have official accounts on it, which are used to release information and interact with netizens. *Tiexue* and *Qiangguo Forum* are the most popular Bulletin Board Sites (BBS) focusing mainly on political and military issues. The former was established by some amateur military fans, and the latter is run by the state-owned *People's Daily*. *Tianya Club* is one of the oldest and most dynamic Internet forums in China. As of 2015, it was ranked by Alexa as the 13th most visited site in the PRC (<http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/tianya.cn>).

⁵¹ For example, according to Gries et al. (2015) and Shen (2012), *Sina Blog* is relatively liberal while *Tiexue Forum* is known for being nationalist.

Admittedly, online data cannot be representative of the overall Chinese opinion, as ‘Internet users tend to be younger, more urban and more educated than the Chinese population as a whole’ (Gries, Steiger, & Wang, 2015, p. 5). However, it should be noted that this group of people is more likely to participate in discussions on public policy, have more capability to make their voices heard and thus exercise a remarkable influence on China’s struggle for international recognition.

3. International media reports

‘International media’ [Chinese: 海外媒体] is a Chinese political term referring to the media industries of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan as well as the foreign media at large. Basically, all these media platforms are out of the CCP’s direct rulings⁵² and, also, to a great degree, are guarded against by China’s rulers. The purpose of analysing international media reports is very clear—to understand the observations and comments from a third perspective. As a classical Chinese saying goes, ‘Generally, for matters under heaven, those closely involved cannot see as clearly as those outside’ [Chinese: 大凡天下事，当局者迷，旁观者清]. More from a position of being observers of China’s face diplomacy, foreign journalists and commentators are supposed to have different feelings or judgments (that are not necessarily objective) about China’s face

⁵² As China’s special administrative regions, Hong Kong and Macau are relatively special cases. Press freedom in these two places is protected by the *Bill of Rights*, unlike Mainland China that is under the pervasive control of the CCP. However, in recent years, journalists and media owners from Hong Kong, particularly those critical of Beijing, still come under increasing pressure from the government of Hong Kong and Chinese authorities (*Freedom House*, 2016).

diplomacy. To begin with, I found 87 news reports or comments about my research topic in the international media, of which I selected 39 pieces for further study.

4.2 Views of Chinese Diplomats

All of the 17 interviewees have a similar understanding of the cultural meaning of *face*, namely, a person's social image, status or dignity. They also admit that face culture indeed prompts China to pursue international recognition as a major power. Given their different fields of work and experiences, my respondents in fact have different perspectives on this issue. According to the meta-aggregation method, the author summarises four categories of findings. The total number of interviewees is certainly limited.⁵³ In order to support some arguments, this section also cites the opinions of some of China's foreign policy makers and high-level diplomats on the basis of their public speeches, interviews or articles.

⁵³ In Section 4.2, unless otherwise referenced, the quotes are all from the 17 interviewees.

4.2.1 Face is important but not the most important

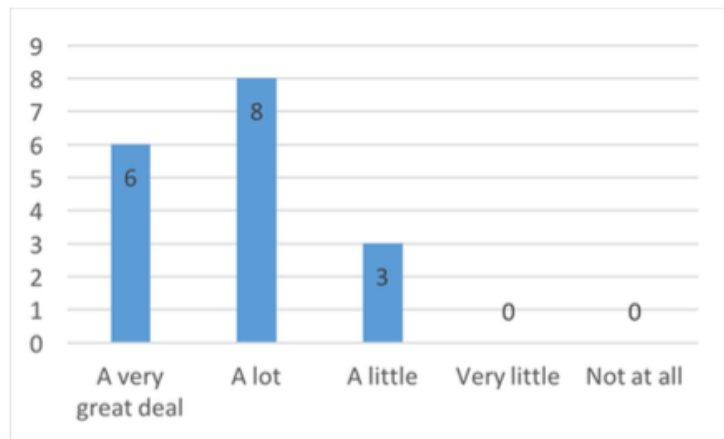


Figure 4.2. Answers to the question, ‘To what degree do you think face culture influences Chinese diplomacy today?’

Figure 4.2 shows the interviewees’ opinions on the degree to which Chinese face culture impacts China’s diplomacy. The overwhelming majority of them chose the options *a very great deal* or *a lot*. Simultaneously, almost all of them emphasised the fact that Chinese diplomacy predominantly aims to achieve national interests rather than recognition or international reputation. The most typical viewpoint is that China’s face or international recognition is a tool of diplomacy or a kind of national interest, which can be viewed as serving national interests that are more important than face. Similar opinions are exemplified in the following quotes:

‘I classify international recognition issues as “technical matters” in my work, which there is always a way to solve. What is really troubling is still the national-interest issues.’

‘Very often, China indeed seems to sacrifice its interest only for applause. However, it is very likely that the people outside have no information about China’s real purpose, or it is somewhat likely that our decision-makers indeed make miscalculations. Anyhow, it is impossible for us to only focus on China’s face.’

‘China has consistently emphasised its “core interests” in recent years, which has told the world clearly that it will not abandon its pursuit of national interest only because of outside criticism or complaints.’

It is evident that among the group of Chinese diplomats, interest-orientated pragmatism trumps fascination for face. In the article *China’s Millennial Diplomacy and the National Mentality*, Ambassador Yuan Nansheng⁵⁴ (2011, p. 66) states that Chinese face culture has closely paralleled Chinese diplomacy from ancient times until the present day, but after China’s reform and opening up in 1978, it has been largely replaced by practical diplomacy.

4.2.2 The senior-most leader is the key

Interviewees generally note that under China’s political system, the remarkableness of the ‘major power’ identity must be endogenous to the state’s foreign strategy but may also be related with the senior-most leader’s face consciousness.

Many of them mentioned that Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC, was always keen to shape

⁵⁴ Yuan Nansheng is the former Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe and Surinam and the current Vice President of the China Foreign Affairs University that is affiliated with the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

the image of a resurgent China, showing a tenacious sense of face in his decision-making. ‘Led by Chairman Mao, China would rather let its people in hunger to provide substantial aid to the so-called friendly countries. Aid to Vietnam or North Korea was of strategic significance at that time; however, aid to Albania and some remote African countries was only exchanged for their praise or being called as “Good Big Brother” [Chinese: 好大哥]. ‘After the Tangshan earthquake⁵⁵, [the] Chinese government rejected foreign assistance, and one underlying reason was to protect its national image of self-reliance. At that time, the country’s face was more important than people’s lives’.



⁵⁵ The 1976 Tangshan earthquake is the worst earthquake of the 20th century in terms of death toll. The number of deaths reported by the Chinese government is around 2,55,000.



Figure 4.3 People Daily reports on the Beijing APEC summit on 11 November 2014⁵⁶

Certainly, it is difficult to pinpoint the Chinese top leaders' personal worldviews and instincts. A majority of respondents believe that President Xi has a strong enthusiasm to present a superior China for the sake of international recognition. Some of their observations are as follows:

“The 2016 G20 summit will be held in Hangzhou, where Xi Jinping once ruled for a long time.⁵⁷ It is not only an opportunity to show China as an already risen power to the world but also a moment to show Xi's past career achievements to all the people.”

⁵⁶ The screenshots of newspaper pages reflect that the Chinese domestic media is keen on creating the impression that President Xi is surrounded and respected by world leaders.

⁵⁷ From 2002 to 2007, Xi Jinping was the CCP party chief of Zhejiang province. Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang.

‘President Xi’s diplomacy in the US is committed to the establishment of a “new model of a major power relationship”. The primary goal seems to be not to stabilise the increasingly antagonistic relationship but to make America clearly acknowledge China’s status as a major power. Such a strategic intention more or less reflects the top leader’s cravings for outside respect.’

‘Beijing lacks enough snow but still could win the 2020 Winter Olympics bid; Beijing’s air pollution is known all over the world, but we still found a way to create ‘APEC Blue’.⁵⁸ I cannot find any difference between Xi and his predecessors in [their efforts to] showcase a perfect China to the world.’

Whether Chinese leaders are influenced strongly by face culture may be an eternal mystery, but one thing is certain—Chinese authorities are very aware of the prominence of face culture in Chinese social psychology. A craving for a superior China is invariably mingled with demands for the CCP’s legitimacy.

‘President Xi’s UK visit is described (by the Chinese diplomats) as the “super state visit”; his US visit is characterised by “a stream of pleasant surprises”. These words are not said to foreigners but to the Chinese.’

⁵⁸ ‘APEC Blue’ [Chinese: APEC 蓝] is a term coined by Chinese netizens to describe the rare blue sky in Beijing during the 2014 APEC leader summit. As Beijing’s air pollution is extremely severe, during APEC in 2014, the government followed a set of comprehensively strict measures to control air pollution, finally ensuring a blue sky and a healthy Beijing for the duration of the summit. The Chinese public is familiar with such levels of control when the authorities need to host large-scale political meetings or international events, such as the Beijing Olympic Games or the Shanghai Expo. Most foreign media outlets consider APEC Blue to be a typical face-saving Chinese act.

'From 2014's APEC summit to 2015's China Victory Day parade and 2016's G20 summit, he [President Xi] knows that the Chinese people are happy to see such diplomatic spectacles. President Xi is surrounded by world leaders, which reminds the Chinese people of the ancient glorious moments when "envoys from innumerable countries came to revere the Chinese emperor" [Chinese: 万国来朝]. Indeed, this may be a kind of backward worldview but is also the Chinese worldview.'

In this sense, dedicating all of one's resources to host various international spectacles is just a response to the Chinese people's political psychology; in other words, a shortcut to make the Chinese happy i.e. to gain regime legitimacy.

Meanwhile, a few respondents pointed out that Xi is a very practical leader and his decision-making is less influenced by face culture. One respondent noted:

'President Xi reiterates the doctrine of the "Three Confidences",⁵⁹ which means that today's Chinese leaders do not really care about what the outside world says and just advocate their citizens to "walk our road, let others say".

⁵⁹ *The Three Confidences Doctrine* [Chinese: 三个自信] is a political creed that the CCP and senior leaders have consistently emphasised since Xi Jinping took office. It is essentially a call to the Chinese people to be confident in our chosen path, confident in our political system and confident in our guiding theories. See also, Zheng, S. (2014). Rising Confidence Behind the "Chinese Dream". *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19(1), 35-48.

4.2.3 Face diplomacy to showcase China as a major power

China as a major power can be observed very saliently in the following role performances: diplomatic visits, diplomatic discourses, economic diplomacy and external assistance and responses to foreign criticism or crises. These behaviours usually have distinctive characteristics of face culture and are described as *face diplomacy* [Chinese: 面子外交].

Diplomatic visits

According to all of my respondents, China's aspiration for superiority is witnessed most vividly in its diplomatic visits, especially by senior leaders. Logically, as Chinese face culture highlights the role of etiquette in manifesting distinctions between superior and inferior, the Chinese naturally pay a lot of attention to standards of reception and smaller details. The underlying concern is that, 'at least *in form and on surface*, China should be treated as a crucially important actor, a power "deserving more attention and welcome than others"'.

The former Chinese Consul General in San Francisco, Guo Changlin (*China Review News*, 2013), has an insightful summary:

Over the years, for the senior leaders' visits, what China has assiduously sought is nothing more than two things: first, at the reception level, the levels should be high; second, with regard to the form of visit, our leader's visit should be conducted like an 'official state visit'. **In short, our diplomacy is to strive for form, reception and face...** A Chinese leader's visit to the US should focus on big issues that have a

bearing on the bilateral relations and the global agenda; however, we [diplomats] usually spend too much time on issues regarding visiting form and reception.

Some interviewees point out that my study is simply making a fuss, because nearly every state cares a lot about diplomatic protocol and reception, which relates to whether a country attains the basic thin recognition as a sovereign state or not. 'Just like the United States or some rich countries from Middle East go even further than China in the issue of diplomatic reception.' Nevertheless, a majority of them still provided me with many details about this aspect of face diplomacy. It can be found that on many occasions, means mistakenly become goals and form inappropriately replaces substance.

'[During diplomatic visits], some leaders are very easily disappointed when their speeches are not appreciated by foreigners, or they complain that they don't find the reception as "good" as they gave to the foreign guests in China. Consequently, we [diplomats] have to raise the level of reception as much as possible by ourselves, and of course the bill needs to be paid by our people in most cases.'

'Whenever domestic officials visit the country where I work, one important and necessary task is to ensure that they can meet the foreign leaders whose official levels are higher than them. It seems that only in this way can our officials have face and our country can have face.'

'As a customary practice [of China's diplomacy], we need to organise many overseas

Chinese⁶⁰ to welcome and see off our top leaders at the airport or while driving on the street during their visits. If there is expected to be an anti-Chinese government demonstration, what we have to do is organise a larger supporting team to overwhelm them, ensuring that nothing will embarrass our leader. This is our Chinese characteristic.'

'As a general rule, a top leader's visit is supposed to be accompanied by remarkable achievements of bilateral relationship. Even if there is indeed nothing, we [diplomats] still need to create "something". It is no exaggeration to say that one visit of the top leaders will set our working relationship with the counterpart foreign ministry back for at least two years.'

It can be seen that my interviewees have some complaints about the tedious tasks that must be completed for diplomatic visits. Very often, they have to sacrifice their own face to gain the country's face. This just echoes Taiwanese scholar Hwang Guangguo: 'Impacted by face culture, the Chinese officials need to know how to struggle for the face of *the greater self*. Only by maintaining the face of the collective, one could finally raise his or her personal face and have the possibility of climbing up the power hierarchy [in the bureaucratic system]'

Certainly, the Chinese are not only picky about their own leaders' visits to foreign countries and but also keep trying to perfect foreign leaders' visits to China. In *On China*, Kissinger (2011, p. 237) has admired how skilfully Chinese statesmen use hospitality, ceremony and carefully

⁶⁰ Most people who participate in such activities are overseas students and overseas Chinese businessmen.

cultivated personal relationships as tools of statecraft. Simultaneously, the Chinese have realised that this is not always an appropriate practice. Ambassador Wu Jianmin⁶¹ (*Modern Express*, 2009) says, 'It is always a waste for the Chinese to entertain foreign guests. We care about our face, so we are overly afraid that guests will underestimate our power if the banquet is seemingly simple'.

Diplomatic discourse

For the Chinese, using language (straightforwardly or implicitly) to remind others of hierarchy and to show superiority is an appropriate method of self-presentation to relationship and of seeking face. As one interviewee says, 'in Chinese officialdom, there is a common saying or instruction, "Standing position should be high" [Chinese: 站位要高], which means that official wording and phrasing should appear grand and powerful'. Similarly, in China's diplomatic language, "major power" is a frequently appearing term for China to stand at a high position. Rather than use straightforward language, the Chinese use metaphors, terms, concepts or seemingly modest utterances to keep enhancing their perceived status.

'China refuses the title of G2, but many of its discourses reveal the determination and enthusiasm of being G'x' in the world.'

'Nowadays, a series of Chinese diplomatic terms, such as "*New Type of Great Power Relations*", "*Global Partnership Network*", and "*Major-Power Diplomacy with Chinese*

⁶¹ Wu Jianmin is the former Chinese ambassador to Holland, France and the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Characteristics”, have revealed China’s desire to become one of the few major powers in the world. The demands for gaining face worldwide indeed become more urgent.’

‘In private communication, some officials cannot help exaggerating our strength or burnishing the image of “major power”. Sometimes, these behaviours may easily stir bad feelings, and sometimes make others believe that China is a very developed country.’

‘China’s diplomatic discourse is generally modest and undemonstrative. However, very often, we are still eager to make our foreign audiences aware that China has come back to the centre of the world. Unavoidably, some statements must seem to be self-aggrandising.’

Moreover, Chinese diplomats enthusiastically claim that China is destined to be a special major power. Related discourses always contain claims of China’s exceptional nature and uniqueness. The speech excerpt below is a good illustration of this:

As a poor and weak country in the past, China has gradually come back to international affairs, or, in other words, has occupied the centre of the world stage... And China has so many differences with many other traditional major powers. We have a peculiar political system, huge population and fast speed of development and will further rapidly develop. Consequently, it is understandable that others cannot understand us. (Former Chinese ambassador to Britain, Fu Yin

[2013])

Despite such moves, Chinese officials are also very conscious of giving enough face to their contacts using language that can sometimes seem mechanical. Ambassador Lu Qiutian⁶² (2000) writes in an article, '[On diplomatic occasions], we only have a few words to express our gratitude to [foreigners'] reception: "*Your country is very beautiful*", "*Your people are very friendly*", and "*Your reception is very considerate*". They [foreigners] always wonder why the Chinese do not have any special feelings about them as they travel a great distance to come to their country. This is a typical method of Chinese facework. As the Chinese saying goes, 'There are never too many praises for anyone' [Chinese: 好话不嫌多].

As expected, China avoids discussing differences openly. In an interview, the former State Councillor Dai Bingguo describes China's diplomatic style as follows: 'Defending your principles does not have to be intimidating or unfriendly. I would like to say serious words in a low voice' (*The Beijing News*, 2016). This attitude clearly aims not to offend the face of the other side even in conflict situations. Some of the respondents also made some related comments:

'Too many policy documents or leaders' speeches seem to be devoid of substance.

We are still shy to put interest or conflict on the table and to discuss them straightforwardly.'

'When dissatisfied with some country, China normally refrains from a full

⁶² Lu Qiutian is the former Chinese ambassador to Luxembourg, Romania and Germany.

expression of its real ideas, at least avoiding criticising someone by name. Although everyone knows the object of China's dissatisfaction, from the Chinese perspective, careful speech can leave some leeway for the situation to possibly change.'

Economic diplomacy and external assistance

Being generous with praise is a standard way of seeking face not only in social life but also in international relations. A common perception of Chinese diplomacy is that 'we [Chinese] often sacrifice considerable interests for flashy national images, and commercial or economic interests are usually the first to suffer'.⁶³

In addition, some of my respondents add that foreign countries are well aware of Chinese face concern and expertly take advantage of recognition or even blandishment as a bargaining chip.

'Due to face culture, China's diplomacy becomes very practical. For example, if one European country threatens to take action against our human rights issues, we habitually respond with *Purchasing Diplomacy*. That means, if you give me face, I will buy something from you in return; if you cannot, I will avoid you. Sweden must have the most understanding about this in recent years. But who knows how many

⁶³ One speech of Philippine President Duterte can be used as a corroboration of this opinion. At the Philippines-China Trade and Investment Forum, he emphasised that the Philippines is more willing to receive Chinese loans and assistance. 'We [Philippines] tend to borrow money from China, because sometimes China has provided us with long-term loans, and then forgot to ask us to return the money due to our *friendship*. However, Japan and South Korea would not do this' (*Global Times*, 2016).

unnecessary things China has bought just to save face?’

‘In Africa, many countries are good at extolling China to the skies or giving lip service to “my great friend China”. After some facework, they feel quite justified to ask for aid or to default on construction costs. When cooperating with Westerners, they know to do things according to contract; however, when dealing with China, they are used to ignoring the contract. They believe that their unremitting praise can make China grant whatever is requested.’

‘Southeast Asian countries are very familiar with the Chinese Confucian culture and, to a large extent, they also care about their face. They know well how to serve their own interest by giving recognition to China as a regional major power.’

In an essay, Chinese diplomat Zhai Hua (2009) claims that there are always foreigners intentionally using Chinese face psychology to make deals with China; in this case, international recognition has become their ‘efficient gift’, which has a low cost but high yield.

4.2.4 Fierce face when confronting criticism and crises

China has always been extremely vulnerable to foreign criticism, whether well intentioned or malicious. More often, the Chinese tend to regard foreign criticism as a denial of their country’s identity as a major power and are easily triggered to react emotionally. Ambassador Yuan Nansheng (2011) argues, ‘Due to the influence of face culture, if someone praises us, we will be overjoyed and eager to share this news with others. If someone criticises us, we will denounce

them as an anti-China force instinctively'. One interviewee claims, 'In recent years, we have become firmer in our core issues of interest, but, on the other hand, we still fear critical opinions and care a lot about what others say'.

Xi Jinping addressed the Chinese attitude to foreign criticism in a rare candid speech. During an official visit to Mexico in February 2009, the then Vice President Xi Jinping expressed his dissatisfaction with some foreigners in a meeting with Chinese citizens living overseas:

There are some foreigners who have eaten their fill and have nothing better to do, pointing their fingers at our affairs. China does not, first, export revolution; second, export poverty and hunger; or third, cause unnecessary trouble for you. What else is there to say?⁶⁴

In Chinese face culture, publicly criticising one's seniors is morally unacceptable. Through this seemingly impromptu speech, Xi Jinping classified foreign criticism or interference with China as a sort of unintelligible officiousness. Obviously, in his mind, a perfect world would consist of countries that can keep silent about other countries' internal affairs. His attitude clearly illustrates the consistent antipathy towards open and direct criticism in Chinese social life. This opinion is also echoed by the rule of *renqing*, namely, 'If I don't create trouble for you, why are

⁶⁴ Information source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnQ9M3PY7EI>. At that time, this speech was not reported in China's official state media but on some local TV stations, after which it spread quickly on the Internet. Many Chinese netizens on major websites applauded Xi's tough response to foreign intervention and criticism. One such typical comment from a blogger was, 'We have heard too much diplomatic eyewash when encountering foreign interference in the past, mostly nothing but strong protest or vehement condemnation. For so long a time we have not yet a chance to hear such a frank and direct voice'. (<http://www.chinaelections.org/article/141/143301.html>).

you troubling me?’

To many, small countries are most certainly disqualified from criticising China, as seen in the following comment from one of my interviewees:

Some leaders who have frequent contact with foreigners can react calmly to foreign criticism about China. Some other leaders (who are mainly responsible for domestic affairs) are not quite accustomed to being criticised by small countries and believe firmly that they are ineligible.

The common viewpoint is that guarding its image of ‘a power that cannot be bullied’ is always at the core of China’s reactions to foreign crises (Gries, 2004; Ho, 2015; Loewenberg, 2011). For the Chinese, any compromise can inevitably become an issue of losing face and national dignity. China’s performance in the 2012 Diaoyu Island conflict is a case in point.⁶⁵ When explaining the vehemence of China’s reaction, former State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan told Japanese politicians in a meeting on 29 September 2012 that ‘the Japanese side was deaf to China’s advice and made the Chinese government “thoroughly lose face” [Chinese: 颜面扫地]’ (Yang, 2012). In March 2013, the senior People Liberation Army General Liu Yuan said in an interview, ‘The Diaoyu Island conflicts between China and Japan are actually a “face problem”. Both sides are in a fit of rage, struggling to save face’ (Lin & Li, 2013). Later, in March, in another interview, Liu Yuan

⁶⁵ On 11 September 2012, the Japanese government purchased the Diaoyu Islands from Japanese *private owners* in order to strengthen their control over disputed territories. This move rapidly led to a series of strong counter-measures by the Chinese government and also prompted large-scale anti-Japan protests around China. As of early 2013, the situation was ‘certainly the most serious for Sino-Japanese relations in the post-war period in terms of the risk of militarized conflict’ (Christopher, 2013).

suggested that it was time to negotiate with Japan. According to him, 'the Chinese Party and government has made totally right decisions on the Diaoyu Island conflicts... We have won the support and understanding of the international community. We could say that *China and the Chinese people have gained enough face*' (Ibid.).

In such utterances, it is striking that the imperative to regain face is not conducive to easing conflicts, especially in the early stages of conflict. And, seemingly, only when China feels that its role as a superior has been safeguarded and even promoted does it have the real willingness to negotiate with its opponent.

4.2.5 Harmonious ending

Some of my interviewees believe that face culture encompasses some positive normative elements and definitely promotes harmony among nations:

'Concern for face, more often, has served as a constraint to China's diplomacy. It causes us to uphold our ancestors' virtues: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others" [Chinese: 己所不欲勿施于人]. If I do not want to lose face, I will maintain another's face as much as possible.'

'Face, for the Chinese, is ultimately aimed at the all-embracing harmony of relationships. In the field of international relations, such cultural consciousness still pursues mutual respect and the coexistence of civilisations.'

'China's seeking face in essence reflects its vision for the harmony of the international order and relationships—a kind of yearning for “a happy ending”.'

These comments highlight China's tendency towards ego enhancement and shed light on its narcissistic approach to external affairs. However, it can be seen that while the interviewees had a tendency to amplify goodwill or self-righteous ethics, they deliberately made no mention of the hierarchical views ingrained in face culture. In the Chinese mind, harmonious coexistence worthy of pursuit should clearly manifest in an inegalitarian and hierarchical form.

4.3 Online Public Opinions

Face is frequently used by the Chinese public when describing and evaluating political issues. Searching for the keyword *face* [Chinese: 面子] online leads to numerous results. This section will present 27 carefully selected online comments with the goal to explore their notions about a superior China.

4.3.1 Every issue can be a face issue

An analysis of the findings shows that face culture has been internalised by the Chinese public in its understanding of China's diplomacy. For the public, being recognized as major power is a preferential target for China's diplomacy. Most diplomatic issues are viewed as face issues—whether or not China is respected as a major power by foreign others is an explicit criterion for

the public to judge the success or failure of China's diplomacy.

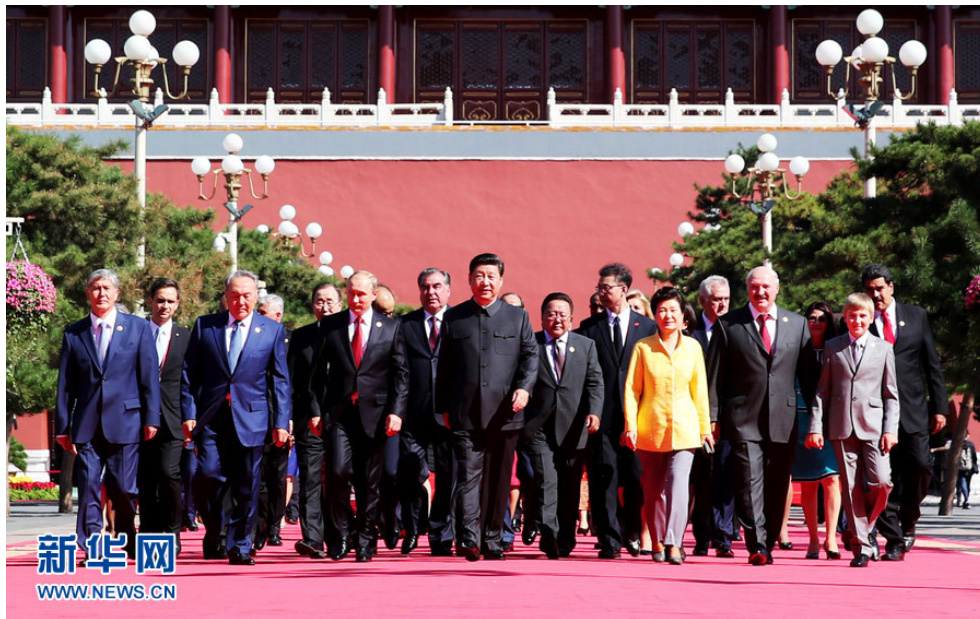


Figure 4.4. Media photo from the 9.3 parade⁶⁶

Before the parade, President Xi and other foreign leaders walked to Tiananmen Gate Tower.

The 2015 China Victory Day Parade is particularly illustrative of such logic. On 3 September 2015, the Chinese government held a military parade in Beijing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of *Victory over Japan Day* in the Second World War. A key focus at this event for the Chinese public was how many foreign leaders would attend the ceremony, especially Western and Japanese leaders. Netizens' observations and comments largely centre around the concept of face, which can be seen in the following online post titles:

⁶⁶ Picture source: Xinhua News Agency. (2015). Xi Jinping attended Victory Day Parade. Retrieved 2 October 2016, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2015-09/03/c_128192441_6.htm.

- *At China's parade, which countries will give China face?*

- *Western countries show indifference towards China's parade. Putin and Park Geun-hye give the most face.*

- *Why don't America, Europe and Japan give China face?*

- *The Cold War between the East and West and the face of a major power*

- *Pyongyang gives no face to China; China cannot bear North Korea anymore*

- *Abe does not give face to China and will lose four opportunities in the future*

These titles illustrate the Chinese obsession with face-attainment, and this parade seems to have been turned into a test of China's international status. Many netizens' opinions reflect the same arrogance—since China's face is well known, all countries should actively participate in its events.

'The consistent goal of the Chinese government for this parade was President Obama's attendance. However, at the time of the parade, Obama was in Alaska, inspecting the impact of climate change on glaciers. To Beijing, this obviously did not give any face to Xi Jinping.' (Netizen opinion 2)

'North Korea refused to give face to China this time and only sent Choe Ryong-Hae as its representative, not even the nominal head of state, Kim Yong-Nam. Moreover, Pyongyang did not send any honour guard to participate in the parade.' (Netizen opinion 3)

'What angers me most is that Singapore's top leader did not attend the ceremony. [During the Second World War] Japan also occupied Singapore and committed horrendous crimes against its people... We should realise that Singapore is still a strategic pawn of the U.S. and not our friend.' (Netizen opinion 4)

'Indonesia, which desperately needs Chinese investment, held off making a decision on whom to send to the parade for quite a long time, and eventually only sent a Minister from a fringe department. [It can be predicted that] Indonesia's attitude towards Beijing will change, and its relationship with China will deteriorate.'⁶⁷ (Netizen opinion 5)

'Besides Czechoslovakia, no Western country sent a senior leader to attend China's parade... I believe that it is not only a matter of face but also about revealing that the U.S., Europe and Japan are forging a new alliance to contain China.' (Netizen opinion 4)

These comments show that, on the one hand, Chinese netizens have high expectations regarding China's gain of face. Despite having sent national representatives to the parade in question, some countries (e.g. North Korea and Indonesia) were still blamed for deliberately embarrassing China. On the other hand, Chinese people seem to be easily satisfied with mere superficial obedience. They have no interest in examining whether China's fundamental traits or values are truly accepted by foreigners. They are just eager to confirm if these foreigners

⁶⁷ For the 9.3 Parade, Indonesia sent its Minister of Human Development and Cultural Affairs as its Presidential Envoy.

attended China's party humbly and on time, whether they praised the country and if they showed it enough respect. Thus, being a 'major power', for the Chinese public, more often than not is only a mask or surface-level show.

In social life, the loss of face might be caused by deliberate provocation from others as well as due to an inevitable discrepancy 'between what a person expects or claims from others and what others extend to him [or her]' (Ho, 2015, p. 873). The latter case may not involve malevolence. When encountering China's loss of face, Chinese netizens generally have no patience to clarify the actual cause but, instead, easily equate dissent with disloyalty and tend to be irritated by any unsatisfying triviality. This kind of reaction reflects Ning Liao's observation (2013, p. 141) about China's place in international relations today: 'The confidence of the resurgent state uneasily coexists with an acute sense of frustration'. In other words, the apparent conceit in fact exposes the feeling of insecurity felt by the Chinese, which prompts them to find every opportunity to confirm or demonstrate their unstable self-importance.

4.3.2 Treat with partiality

The Chinese concept of face is inherently hierarchical, which highlights that giving face to superiors is morally necessary and behaviourally appropriate. Such thinking is closely tied with public opinion about international recognition. Many Chinese people still believe that it is every small country's duty to actively give recognition to all great countries on the basis of hierarchical ethics.

Many posts and comments online express the scornful response of the Chinese public when small countries fail to give face to China. A common viewpoint is that once a small country dares to not give face to China or, in fact, to make China lose face, every other country in the world will dare to do the same. The following comments all represent this point:

'If North Korea, which is supported by China, dared to seize Chinese ships, everyone in the world could decline to give face to China.' (Netizen opinion 13)

'Once we let the small Philippines stir up trouble in the South China Sea, China's face will be totally lost.' (Netizen opinion 14)

'Argentina did not give face at all and China should pay it back blow for blow... If China fails to have a hardline response, all the other countries will follow Argentina, and the safety of the Chinese citizens will be at risk.' (Netizen opinion 15)

A sense of hierarchy is also reflected in the idea that it is acceptable to actively give face to major powers on many occasions. A *major power* for most Chinese people is one of the many developed countries and regional powers around the world. Netizens always indicate their understanding of or support for China's concessions to other big countries, especially the United States, believing that China must give them face for the stability of the relationship or for its own long-term interests. For example, in November 2014, after attending the Beijing APEC leaders' summit, Obama also went to Beijing on a state visit. An online comment about this event stated, 'It is imperative and valuable to give Obama a grand reception. If we give him

enough face, he will naturally bear this in mind in the future' (Netizen opinion 16). Another said, 'China gave so many gifts and so much face to Obama, fully representing our sincerity to establish a new kind of relationship between the two great powers' (Netizen opinion 17). Since 2015, America has made several increasingly proactive attempts to infringe into the South China Sea's expansions. Compared with the dominating attitude they adopt towards small countries, Chinese netizens seemed more calm and rational when it came to the U.S. One blog post said, 'Why not give the U.S. some face in the South China Sea issues and allow it to put on a show for its followers? There is no need to engage in a tough and direct conflict with the U.S.' (Netizen opinion 18). When China announced that it would finish the sea reclamation on some islands and reefs in June 2015, one blog claimed that 'China is just doing a favor for the U.S., ensuring that it can get some face and we can gain our own interests' (Netizen opinion 19).

4.3.3 Tit for tat

When China gains face.

According to the ethical code of face culture, the Chinese are extremely conscious of reciprocity. When China is perceived to receive recognition from others, many online comments suggest the importance of giving face in return in a timely fashion. The logic is very simple: if you give me face, I will give you face or interest in return; if you decline to give me face, I will return like for like.

To the senior foreign leaders who attended the 9.3 Parade, Chinese netizens commonly

expressed their gratitude with lavish praise, believing that they had made the right choice between China and the U.S. They also often suggested the kind of respect the attending countries ought to receive from China. For example, one comment was, 'the presence of President Park Geun-hye carries the most weight. We should give her the highest level of welcome' (Netizen opinion 6). Similarly, 'Park Geun-hye comes to Beijing under intense pressure from the U.S. government. She is admirable and we should think of how to return the favour to South Korea' (Netizen opinion 2).

When China is not given face or loses face

Even when China loses face, Chinese netizens continue to follow the principle of reciprocity, always proposing suggestions about counter-measures that should be taken against those who failed to give China its anticipated recognition. Below are some comments about countries that did not attend the 9.3 Parade:

'No matter what excuse Kim Jong Un has for not attending the parade, he has made a bad impression on the Chinese people... In the future, it will be more difficult for North Korea to get China's political and economic support.' (Netizen opinion 7)

'The United States will suffer the consequences of not giving face to China... China's tit-for-tat reactions have begun to emerge in the South China Sea... You Americans refuse to give us face, we Chinese will make you lose face in return.' (Netizen opinion 8)

'Although the Philippines tirelessly challenges China's core interests, China still keeps providing it with a lot of assistance. Now when China has a ceremony, as a neighbour, you should participate in it... The Philippines chose to follow Japan and did not give China face, and it will face the negative consequences of this for a long time.' (Netizen opinion 9)

Apart from suggesting counter-measures, the Chinese also react to the loss of face through 'self-consolation' i.e. understating the unfavourable effects of the loss of face or labelling the other side as the one who has really lost face. A case in point is an incident on 2 February 2009 when



Figure 4.5. Chinese State Television news report about Wen's speech at Cambridge University

The title of this news item is, 'A man disturbed Wen Jiabao's speech at Cambridge University, drawing the strong opposition of the teachers and students present there.'

a protester threw a shoe at the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his speech at

Cambridge University. This incident was necessarily regarded as 'making China lose face' by the Chinese authorities and the public. Even Wen Jiabao's reaction was a bit too serious.⁶⁸ Many netizens strongly condemned this incident and also showed how to feel a sense of spiritual triumph through self-consolation.

'The one who lost face is not China but Cambridge University. It is surprising that Cambridge University, a palace of world civilization, treated a Chinese elder in this way... When you the Western politicians give lectures in China, we would never allow such a rogue to make such trouble.' (Netizen opinion 10)

'The British men are very clear that China cares about its face very much... Consequently, it can be seen that the UK government expressed a high-profile apology immediately, making us regain enough face.' (Netizen opinion 11)

'The gesture of China's Premier (in response to being attacked) shows not only calmness and wisdom but also Chinese uprightness, confidence, dignity and a great mind. Western politicians cannot be compared to ours in this respect.' (Netizen opinion 12)

Turning defeats into victories is a typical face-saving self-deceptive tactic that the Chinese are

⁶⁸ After the shoe-throwing incident, Wen continued his speech and condemned the behaviour: 'Teachers and students, such despicable behavior cannot hold back the friendship of the Chinese and British people. [The] progress of mankind and [the] harmony of the world are the tides of history. No force can hold them back.' Related reports: The Telegraph. (2009). Shoe: Man charged for throwing shoe at Chinese Prime Minister. Retrieved April 26, 2016, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/4445952/Shoe-man-charged-for-throwing-shoe-at-Chinese-Prime-Minister.html>.

adept at. The above arguments all try to remedy the battered image of a major power from this embarrassment and to regain psychological balance by transforming a 'loss of face' into the 'gain of face'.

4.3.4 Criticism towards face diplomacy

There are a large number of different opinions in China when it comes to face diplomacy. Since I started this research, I have been asking every Chinese person I meet, 'Do you support China's face diplomacy? Do you support the fact that the Chinese government tries to be recognised as a major power, no matter what price it has to pay?' I still do not have a clear idea about which side the majority of people fall on—supporting or opposing. Many believe that to seek face is always unquestionably justified in Chinese life, so it will be the same with the country. I once asked a taxi driver in Beijing whether, as a local citizen, he approved of so many international summits held in Beijing one after another and whether he felt troubled by these 'perfectly' organised activities. He said, 'I totally support these international activities. I would like to be bothered by these. What is Beijing for? It is a *capital*, meant to gain face for the country. The whole world does need to come to Beijing to see our country, our developments. We [Chinese] have been repressed for so many years, and it is time for us to "hold our heads high" [Chinese: 扬眉吐气]'. One of my young friends who grew up and still lives in Beijing expressed a different feeling: 'Many people have become fed up with the non-stop international summits held in China. The mentality of people who live in developed areas [of China] has been very mature,

and they [the citizens] care more about their daily lives instead of the country's face'.

Here are some fragments from an article called *Hangzhou G20: Great Nation and Vanished Society* (Xu, 2016), which documents how the Chinese government hosts international summits in order to gain face and how divergent the Chinese public's opinions are regarding face diplomacy:⁶⁹

Over the past several months, the main streets of Hangzhou have been purged, buildings along the streets repainted and all outdoor construction is required to stop before September. [During the conference] all the factories on the periphery of Hangzhou were scheduled to shut down in order to create the G20 blue sky. Express deliveries in Zhejiang Province were tightly controlled, which resulted in a serious impact on Hangzhou's e-commerce and express industry. Many public institutions let their employees go on holiday from early September, and universities [in Hangzhou] postponed their opening dates. During the G20, Hangzhou's citizens could visit scenic spots of Zhejiang province either for free or with heavy discounts, and even some attractions in Anhui and Guizhou offered discounts to citizens of Hangzhou.

In Hangzhou, many migrant workers were repatriated, and rental houses became vacant. All the small shops near the summit zone were closed and were formally given only very little compensation. All of these actions were claimed to be for the

⁶⁹ The 2016 G20 Hangzhou summit was the 11th G20 meeting, held on 4-5 September 2016 in Hangzhou, the capital of the Zhejiang Province.

security of G20 and citizens were required to comply with them unconditionally. The government indeed did not force all the citizens to leave their city but tried various means to make the hosts—the people of Hangzhou—not stay there [during the meeting]. In early September, Hangzhou was like an empty city. More importantly, there is no law or formal regulation for many of the repatriations and limitations.

[...]

[On Chinese social media] comments sharply contrast between fervent praise and incessant complaints. It is difficult to identify which sound is louder and more real... People who dislike G20 rebuke it as a *Face Project* [Chinese: 面子工程], which cannot benefit the citizens, and some others say that G20 is also their own affair which they would like to serve. The former set denounces the latter for being hypocritical and blindly patriotic; the latter criticizes the former for being selfish and immoral. Views of all parties... contend with each other fiercely and only emphasize that their own opinion must be right and others must be wrong. Various ideas are intolerant, mutually exclusive and cannot coexist with others.

Indeed, a large number of online users have a distinctly critical attitude towards face diplomacy. Of course, not all the criticism seen on Chinese websites is against the Chinese government—only some of it opposes certain diplomatic behaviours that seem to be too concerned with the country's face. One prevailing view is that 'it is time to say goodbye to face

diplomacy'. (Netizen opinion 20).

Ignoring cost

'Today, Chinese citizens always criticize the government for allocating resources abroad when poverty and other pressing challenges still exist at home' (Shambaugh, 2014). In the collected data, many netizens expressed their concern about China's role as a self-sacrificial actor in the search for recognition and want the government to handle diplomacy with the national interest in mind. Such ideas can be seen in the following quotes:

'Our diplomacy always overemphasizes face but neglects the protection of our core interests. We do not care about the scale of the honor guard or national dinners [hosted by foreigners]. What we should be concerned about is our country's interests.' (Netizen opinion 21)

'To show national strength, we either buy rich countries' national debts without considering the risks or conduct dollar diplomacy or purchasing diplomacy around the world. In this way, we naturally gain face, but no one is clear of what substantial interests we really gain.' (Netizen opinion 22)

'China is still not rich and, in fact, there are many vast areas that are poorer than the countries we give aid to. It is bitterly disappointing that our government keeps throwing money lavishly to the outside world only to gain face as a major power.' (Netizen opinion 23)

'The term 'APEC Blue' has a special meaning, referring to something that is

beautiful but fleeting and ultimately inauthentic. For the sake of such beauty, for a superficially glamorous face, we always waste manpower and money.' (Netizen opinion 24)

Empty slogans

Some people think China should reduce its diplomatic slogans and titles intended only to show its greatness, but which seldom really bring international recognition to China and, in fact, often increase misunderstandings with other countries. According to one blog post, 'In recent years, China's diplomatic authority has invented many new terms, new slogans, new concepts, such as *Great Power Diplomacy*, *Diplomatic Confidence*, *Diplomatic Composure*, *New Pattern of Relationship between Great Powers*... If these concepts were proposed by the United States Secretary of State or the Russian Foreign Minister, the whole world would take their implications seriously. However, because they have been coined by Chinese diplomats, everyone knows that they are only intended to prettify China's image and please the Chinese leaders and public' (Netizen opinion 25).

Circumventing criticism

It is generally believed that face concern is a sign of a lack of self-confidence. One article presents the following sharp criticism, 'China only develops relations with states who are obsequious to us, and it treats negatively the states who criticize us... We should realize that

only the countries that have the ability to influence the world dare to criticise China' (Netizen opinion 25). Some netizens expect that, with China's rise, it could develop a more mature and confident mentality and heed the counsel of outside voices. One typical opinion is, 'Two questions are worth our consideration. First, how do foreigners make comments on China? Do they judge China independently and objectively? Second, what is the real purpose behind their comments? If some only say nice things, does this mean they are really friendly towards us? If some criticize us without mercy, do they really hate China?' (Netizen opinion 26).

The domestically oriented international image.

The public has been progressively conscious of the fact that much of China's international recognition has been created by Chinese authorities and the media, to promote the domestic legitimacy of the regime. 'Contemporary Chinese diplomacy still has a very strong sense of face, and the official propaganda departments are always committed to singing the country's praises. Our newspapers only publish foreigners' praise and good words' (Netizen opinion 27). When China had conflicts with Japan over the Diaoyu Islands in early 2013, one netizen noted that during that period, our media emphasised that 'the Japanese leaders unceasingly seek compromise, but our leaders deliberately alienate them' (Netizen opinion 27). The only information conveyed is that 'China has restored its lost face from Japan' (Ibid.).

4.4 Reports from Overseas Medias

China's face diplomacy is an enduring topic in international media reports. *Face* as a cultural concept is often cited along with some other typically Chinese behavioural patterns. In addition, the international medias also closely observes foreign countries and, specifically, how they respond to China's face diplomacy.

4.4.1 Crucial diplomatic goal

The international medias often report that China's heightened sense of face culture constitutes its key motivational factor for seeking international acclamation.

Whenever China hosts major international events, the term of *face* is always mentioned to describe the Chinese government's elaborate preparations and hospitable reception. For example, regarding the authority's measures to control air pollution in Beijing during the 2014 APEC summit, George Chen (2014) commented, 'It's no secret that the new Chinese leadership is so keen to show off the country's economic success by hosting the APEC summit that anything that is considered counter-productive to having "face" for China should be eliminated by all means'. *Bowen Press* (2016) described 2016's Boao Forum for Asia in the following words: 'At the last moment of the closing performance and dinner, most of the guests and staff members must feel relieved about this boring and marathon forum, as this extravagant and luxurious show is only another face project of the Chinese government'. The grandest meeting in the first half of 2017 must have been the Belt and Road forum held in Beijing, which

attracted heads of 29 states and representatives from more than 190 countries and international organisations. Kadira Pethiyagoda (2017) says, 'The Silk Road Summit, covering China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, is as much about celebrating Beijing's rise as the 2008 Olympics were... This is infused with the concept of *mianzi* or *face*, which prioritizes recognition by others'.

Certainly, face concern, or the fetishising of protocol and hierarchy in diplomatic visits, has also been noticed by the media. When reporting on the first official meeting between President Xi and President Trump in April 2017, *Reuters* voices China's real focus:

'Ensuring President Xi does not lose face is a top priority for China,' a Chinese official said. U.S. Presidents' meetings with their Chinese counterparts are usually more tightly scripted than with other foreign leaders, something Chinese officials insist on to make sure they are treated with the decorum they believe befits a global power. (Brunnstrom, Spetalinick, & Blanchard, 2017)

An article from the *South China Morning Post*, a newspaper from Singapore, points out that 'summit diplomacy is perceived differently in Beijing and Washington, with Chinese diplomats appearing to attach more importance to protocol and American ones preferring to focus on substance over form, and that raises the stakes enormously' (Shi, 2017). In particular, 'small symbols such as their [Xi and Trump's] handshakes are all part of diplomacy and often cited as diplomatic accomplishments' (Ibid.). On the same issue, *TIME* (2017) says, 'Donald Trump's hands are a problem for the protocol-conscious Chinese delegation', and 'any tomfoolery like an

Abe handshake would not be easily laughed off⁷⁰ (Campbell, 2017).

An indispensable way of accommodating China's face demands is to ensure that Chinese leaders enjoy diplomatic courtesies that are above their level. For example, in June 2014, the British media commonly published report along these lines: 'Chinese officials threatened to sabotage an important diplomatic trip to Britain by the Communist country's prime minister (i.e., Li Keqiang) unless he could meet the Queen' (Webb, 2014). Then, interestingly, China's official media also responded to the accusation. An editorial in the *Global Times* (2014) says, 'It is completely normal and proper for the Chinese premier to meet with the British Queen, who should make her own contribution to the success of this diplomatic event... A rising country should understand the embarrassment of an old declining empire and at times the eccentric acts it does to hide such embarrassment'.

Whenever China is confronted with a diplomatic crisis, maintaining or saving face is always viewed as the first priority of the Chinese authorities. When Japan seized a Chinese fishing vessel that strayed close to the disputed Diaoyu Islands in September 2010, Hong Kong's *Apple Daily* stated that Beijing's primary task must have been to preserve its face as a regional major power. 'According to past experience, China's sanction against or compromise with Japan could not guarantee consistency, which were always subordinate to only the CPC's face rather than national interests and public opinions' (Ping, 2010). In 2010, when the Nobel Committee

⁷⁰ The background here is that on 10 February 2017, President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shared a 19-second handshake during a photo-op at the White House. During the whole process, Trump is believed to have been impolite and mighty, embarrassing his Japanese counterpart.

awarded the Chinese literary critic Liu Xiaobo the Nobel Peace Prize, this event was 'a horrible embarrassment that makes China lose face' (Peter, 2010). Regarding China's reactions, the *Telegraph* states that 'China responded like a scolded child determined to spoil the party, doing everything in its power to undermine the Nobel ceremony' (Ibid.).

The Chinese media is the main force behind presenting China's international face to its domestic audience. *CNBC* notes that for Xi Jinping's state visit to Britain in 2015, 'China's propaganda machine has cranked into top gear as Chinese President Xi Jinping takes a grand tour of Britain, with media lauding the "super state tour" as a "breakthrough" in U.K.-Chinese relations' (Kit, 2015). *Sky News* also observed that 'as far as anyone following China's media coverage is concerned, the President's visit is an unmitigated and quite extraordinary success' (Katie, 2015). On the content of the report, 'Chinese media obsessively chronicled every detail of Xi's state visit, describing each dish served at the state dinner, along with the significance of flowers used for the decor (the rose is precious in the East and the West) and the 21-gun salute' (David, 2015).

To sum up, Chinese diplomacy has a soft spot for positive attention given to Chinese leaders in the foreign press. Although China can be regarded as a rational international actor, its pursuit of international recognition makes it tend to neglect some more valuable issues or interests, or to be seemingly easily satisfied with mere superficial respect.

4.4.2 Behind the scenes

For the Chinese, preserving face is much more imperative than being candid about one's true feelings in public. According to this logic, the most secure way of dealing with interpersonal contradictions is to 'prevent conflicts from rising to the surface' (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991) or at least to maintain superficial stability in a relationship. This also means that Chinese facework is habitually conducted in a very theatrical way or, as a saying goes in China, 'do one thing in front of people and another behind their backs' [Chinese: 人前一套, 人后一套].

This kind of facework is often witnessed in how China deals with problems under the table. Australian journalist John Garnaut (Cited from *China Review News*, 2009) emphasises the necessity of conducting diplomacy with China privately. He believes that foreign leaders can indeed discuss any taboo topic with Beijing or take any measure that may violate China's core interests, but the trick is *to do it silently*. *Deutsche Welle* (2014) summarises the communication skills needed to get along with China as follows: 'Do not make China lose face; do not adopt symbolic measures; do not [create a] hue and cry, and just insist silently'. One commentary published in *The New York Times* suggests that American politicians should be more considerate and flexible when dealing with China's human rights issues. Concretely, 'the Chinese are saying to Americans, if you grant me face, I can be reasonable; if solving the problem will help me, I'll consider it. But don't expect me to make concessions under pressure' (Min, 2011).

Cited from the Chinese website of the *Financial Times*, Xue Li (2017), a scholar at the Chinese

Academy of Social Science, criticises the leaders of Singapore for making Sino-Singapore relations tense following 2016's South China Sea incident:

They [the leaders of Singapore] think little of the function of face culture in China's diplomacy and tend to use the western ways of thinking to deal with China, e.g., to react publicly, ignore private communication, highlight rationality and law, and neglect emotion and politics. They do not distinguish properly between 'issues that can be publicly declared' and 'issues that should be privately communicated'. For the Chinese, all of these behaviors seem to be 'not my kind of people' [Chinese: 非我族类]. This may be the deep reason why this time the Chinese who have different political attitudes all feel antipathy against Singapore.

4.4.3 Foreigners' understanding of China's face diplomacy

Foreign leaders have commonly shown sophistication in their understanding of China's face diplomacy and have been successful at trying to do good by giving recognition to China.

Nowadays, the worldwide consensus is that China would be happy to pay substantial costs just to be recognised as superior. According to *Apple Daily*, 'During visits to some countries, the top Chinese leaders are willing to spend money heedlessly on the meaningless title "partnership" or some lavish praise. For Hu Jintao's and Xi Jinping's state visit to the U.S., China respectively spent 24.9 billion and 27.1 billion dollars on American goods. Both were typical examples of "Big Gift Diplomacy" [Chinese: 大礼外交]' (Ping, 2012). The international media also noticed

that foreign leaders are familiar with China's face concerns. According to *21CB.com*, 'Consciously aware or not, Obama seems astutely privy to the Chinese government's cultural emphasis on face' (Sue, 2009). The Hong Kong-based *Ming Newspaper* points out that it is totally expected that on his 2015 state visit to the U.S., Xi would receive a grand reception, as 'Obama, who has known very well about Chinese face culture just adopts a realistic tactic of "China gains face and America gains interests". He used the ceremony to welcome Xi Jinping, making his Chinese guest feel at home' (Ding, 2015).

Certainly, President Obama is not the only leader who expertly caters to China's face diplomacy. For Xi's 2015 state visit to the U.K., the *Guardian* notes that 'Britain's determination to build a golden era of relations with China and its increasing silence on issues such as human rights marks a striking U-turn for David Cameron' (Tom, 2015), who had dared to openly criticise the human rights conditions in China in the past. In the face of the fierce criticism that Britain has abandoned its political principles by cosyng up China, British officials claimed that they 'can achieve more by raising issues such as human rights behind the scenes than by hectoring Beijing publicly' (*Reuters*, 2015).

In October 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made her eighth official visit to China. One article published on *Deutsche Welle's* website praises Merkel's diplomatic skills: 'On the one hand, she never stops offering criticism to China, exuding her confidence as a leader of a European major power; on the other hand, she also knows what she said can make China gain enough face' (*Deutsche Welle*, 2015). Interestingly, when journalists met with the Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, Merkel said, 'We can also provide beautiful pomp to the Chinese

guests... The only problem is that we Germans do not have a queen' (Ibid.).

China's neighbours are believed to have more cultural advantages than the Westerners when it comes to responding to Chinese face concerns. As argued by Niu Baiyu (2014), a political commentator from Hong Kong, the Japanese government has a very thorough understanding of China's face culture: 'A common dynamic can be found very easily in the Sino-Japan diplomatic history: Japan often stirs up trouble and then shows a very tough posture just like China in the early stages of a conflict. However, when Japan achieves its goal, it will soften the attitude very quickly, be obsequious to China and give China enough face. The Chinese authorities will be very satisfied with this pattern of treatment. However, eventually, we can find that China gets nothing more than face but loses many interests, and Japan just seemingly loses some face but gains the expected substantial interests'.

More often, the international media makes negative comments about foreign support for China's face diplomacy, generally criticising their leaders or governments for being subject to blatant realism with China. For example, according to *Apple Daily*, 'The British government has converted diplomacy into an undisguised transaction with China. There is no value involved in the communication, only money and price' (Tao, 2015). In the eyes of foreign observers, giving face to China without any principles will make China more aggressive and unscrupulous. When President Obama cancelled his meeting with the Dalai Lama before his visit to China in 2009, *Spero News* pointed out, 'While President Obama might have thought he was giving face to China's government by deferring the meeting, it could be construed by many in China as a back down—something that would entail significant loss of face for America—a sure sign of its

weakness' (Constance, 2009).

4.5 Conclusion

Following this categorisation of the three kinds of research material, the next step is to generate a comprehensive set of synthesised conclusions about the core research questions.

4.5.1 Face culture: An enduring motivational factor.

China's goal to be seen as a major power on the world stage is bound to be the result of various factors related to China's realities and values. One thing is for sure: face culture, as a motivational factor,⁷¹ triggers and drives China's need to be recognised as a major power. For most Chinese people, when they think of their struggle for international recognition, they habitually regard it as the same game they play in their social lives i.e. the highest priority is to be a superior member of the pre-existing hierarchy; the most ideal situation is to enjoy the voluntary respect of one's self-conscious inferiors.

Diplomats' viewpoints shed light on how face culture mirrors the ideas of Chinese decision-

⁷¹ Existing research on China's goal to be recognised as a major power is concerned more with the historical factors. Many scholars believe that China's pursuit of recognition is embedded in its long history of dominating East Asia and regarding itself as 'the only civilization under heaven' [Chinese: 天朝上国]. While admitting the role of Chinese history in shaping its diplomacy today, I also believe that we should not exaggerate or overestimate the influence of history. This is because, as argued by Ja lan Chong (2013, p. 18), fewer and fewer people today have had a direct experience of China's history of humiliation, and no one alive today has personal memories of the 'Confucian' world order or tributary system.

makers and diplomatic practitioners. Specifically, due to face concern, Chinese diplomats give all or unnecessary amounts of their consideration to China's role conception as a major power, and they sometimes even sacrifice their own face to gain face for the country. Moreover, although many of my interviewees are intensely aware that the pursuit of such a role is often unwisely at the cost of national interest or substantial content, they still admit that face culture remains entrenched in the minds of the Chinese people and is difficult to change. Constructing and safeguarding China as a major power has become the preeminent objective of their work.

The frequent references to face culture have been attributed to the Chinese public's expectations from their country's diplomats. A large proportion of Chinese people are predisposed to viewing diplomatic issues as face issues. They commonly believe that to gain international recognition as a major power is a necessary and even primary diplomatic objective, and it is eminently reasonable to use the national face culture in the sphere of international relations.

In addition, supporting China's facework in its bid to be seen as a major power has become a practical bargaining tool that foreign countries often utilise in their dealings with China.

4.5.2 Conceptualising China's role as a major power

This chapter has presented and analysed the hypothesis that China tends to enact the role conception of a major power in order to seek international recognition. A more meaningful discovery of this analysis is that this is not simply the manifestation of China's desire for power

or for its emotional satisfaction but has been configured and reconfigured by many elements of face culture 'that have been institutionalized as the constitutive and regulative meanings of the collective identity' (Liao, 2012, p. 140). In this sense, face culture is demonstrated to be an idiosyncratic template by which China constructs and interprets its national role conception for recognition. Through an analysis of the collected research material, we can answer a critical question: What kind of major power does China want to be?

In social life, a Chinese person 'links face to the maintenance of the social hierarchy he or she lives in' (Arundale, 2006, p. 197). People have been accustomed to seeking recognition and shaping their image in asymmetrical relationships, or, in other words, people are used to highlighting, maintaining or shaping relational asymmetry to gain social recognition.⁷² The research findings of this book have proven the logic that China's struggle for international recognition is not merely a matter of individual strength but more a kind of self-presentation to relationship—a matter of the relational self. On the one hand, Chinese people seem to 'have no distinctive awareness of their own existence' (Hwang, 2011, p. 192), and almost every endeavour for international recognition needs the sense of being connected with others (and, for China, the more, the better). Williams (1997, p. 358) argues that 'when states enter into the process of recognition, what they seek is recognition of their independence as an end in itself'. However, China seems to seek its independence as an end in coexistence between itself and others. On the other hand, their considerations of recognition are often unhesitatingly centred around a relational self that occupies a superior status. From the political elite to the common

⁷² A concrete cultural analysis can be seen in Sections 3.6 and 3.7.1.

public, the Chinese are usually extremely sensitive about their country's relative position i.e. above, below or on an equal footing with others.

Based on the logic of face culture, China's conceptualisation as a major power is essentially a **sense of centrality, which prompts China to unceasingly pursue being seen as the symbolic centre of international society.** A classical saying from the *Dao De Jing* [Chinese: 道德经], a fundamental text of ancient Chinese philosophy, describes this sense of centrality very aptly:

Big country shall behave like the downstream of a river (*receptive of all the rivers from the upstream*). It shall act as the womb of the world (*nurturing all things, helping everybody wherever possible*), and the center for people of the world to meet and build diplomatic relations.⁷³

It delineates an ideal state as indicated by face culture: Like 'the lower reaches of a river', China does not need to control the flow of the direction of every tributary and just needs to wait effortlessly for all the surrounding streams to come to it. It is China's destiny to become 'the centre for the people of the world to meet and build diplomatic relations'. In other words, just like attending a performance, China can totally accept adopting an insignificant role or sitting silently in the audience, but it always insists on standing at the centre of the stage or sitting in the best seat in the auditorium. In the Chinese mind, obtaining a sense of centrality can make China's status as a major power more substantial and will automatically allow it to gain face or

⁷³ The translation here is cited from Chung Boon Kuan's (2013) *Lao Zi Philosophy of Liberal Government*. The original title in Chinese is 大邦者下流，天下之牝，天下之交也。

real recognition from others. This logic can lead to the three findings below:

1. The centrality China seeks is not a hub-and-spoke network, in which actors are virtually 'tied to the central node and must go through the network to communicate with each other' (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2001, p. 316).
2. The centrality China seeks does not require substantial homogeneity, which means that China does not care about whether the other actors in the same network are same or similar in nature to itself.
3. The centrality China seeks is not a sense of hegemony. In its struggle for recognition, China does not seek to exclude other great powers' existence or remarkableness or to establish an exclusive sphere of influence.

In this sense, the recognition China struggles for is never only (or sometimes totally not) a confirmation of its power capabilities but always a courteous reception that meets the expectations of the Chinese people. **A predilection of formalism exists remarkably in China's struggle.** The so-called face diplomacy largely manifests as a movement towards formalism, a meticulous search for respectful treatment and a self-entertaining performance conducted by perfectionists. More often, China does not have great ambition, and what it pursues is just a relative advantage over others, no matter how slim the advantage is (c.f., Pan, 2016, p. 312).

We can also easily understand some of China's behavioural conflicts: China would like to be a central player to show off its power but not necessarily to be a determining force to exert

power on many substantial affairs; China likes the feeling of being surrounded by the other international actors on the world stage but shows very little interest in establishing a closed camp under its control or 'exporting one ultimate value or system to the outside world' (Zhang, 2011, p. 15). One case in point is that China attaches importance to its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and relishes such political theatre in which it always stands at the centre; meanwhile, 'Beijing usually takes a lowest-common-denominator approach, adopting the safest and least controversial position and waiting to see the positions of other governments before revealing its own' (Shambaugh, 2014).

Another important finding of this research is the Chinese illusion of international recognition. As the collected data indicates, Chinese people strongly believe their country, as an unquestioned superior, is entitled to certain recognition and privileges accorded to it by the international community, which is in line with norms regulating face in their social lives. They expect all the countries of the world to respect its self-righteous hierarchical ethics, and small countries especially are expected to give China face much more self-consciously. According to this logic, in the Chinese mind, the least they desire is no loss in its perceived status as a major power, and the thin recognition they pursue is essentially a kind of equality among other major powers and not among all the international actors. As Deng Yong (2008, p. 8) argues, 'the Chinese consider the rise of China a restoration of fairness rather than gaining advantage over others'. It can be concluded that **the sense of hierarchy results in Chinese people confusing 'thin recognition' with 'thick recognition'**,⁷⁴ consciously or unconsciously. There is no idea

⁷⁴ A related discussion on thin recognition and thick recognition can be found in Section 1.1.1. *Thin recognition* means that

or expectation of 'equality', either in the context of international law or egalitarian values. Consequently, when China fails to gain the aspired thick recognition from the outside world, it irrationally believes that it is not being given even the bare minimum recognition it deserves as a 'normal' country. People have an 'all-or-nothing' approach, which cannot accept any intermediate or partial result in the context of international recognition. The Chinese government and official media often complain that other governments or foreign politicians 'hurt the feelings of the Chinese people'.⁷⁵ By this token, Chinese people's feelings are indeed very easily hurt by others as they always have exaggerated expectations of recognition and confuse equality with superiority.

Last but not the least, **China's quest to be identified as a major power can sometimes end with ostensible recognition or temporary praise in place of sincere and consistent acknowledgement.** As argued by Tang and Qi (2008, p. 65), 'others' recognition always brings us [Chinese] pleasure, even the hypocritical ones; nevertheless, others' derecognition must annoy us, even the sincere or friendly ones'. It is acceptable for China that 'there is a discrepancy between diplomacy rhetoric and diplomacy in its practical form of policies and actions' (Scott, 2015, p. 261). China does not really require any real or complete recognition of its status as a major power. Many of the time, just a superficial, ceremonial and verbal

'formally, a state has an equal status in the eyes of others' (Wendt, 1999, p. 237). *Thick recognition* means 'acknowledge[ment] of particular qualities that characterize actors in terms of their differences, which underlines particularistic features of identity' (Strombom, 2014, p. 171).

⁷⁵ 'Hurt the feelings of the Chinese people' [Chinese: 伤害中国人民感情] is a political phrase commonly used by members of the Chinese government and media. This meme usually occurs in tandem with other standard kvetching: 'grossly interfered with China's internal affairs', 'hurt the feelings of the Chinese people', 'harmed the China-XYZ relations'.

acknowledgement will suffice. Japanese Sinologist Watanabe Hidekata's (as cited in Zhai, 2011, p. 31) comment on China's ancient diplomacy remains relevant to describing the Chinese mentality even today:

Since ancient times, the Chinese have cared too much about face. They had been respectful of barbarians and constantly had to bow and kowtow in order to survive.⁷⁶ Even in such conditions, they still referred to themselves as 'Elder Brother' and their opponent as 'Younger Brother', which was able to give them full satisfaction.

4.5.3 China's righteousness and self-righteousness

Scholars generally believe that the Chinese concern with face can become a source of conflict but can also serve as a facilitator of social interactions (Gries, 2004, p 27). It is mainly because face culture 'keeps up the consciousness of moral boundaries, maintains moral values and expresses the force for social sanction' (Ho, 2015, p. 3). According to Major Locke (2007, p. 39), 'striving for face creates a social pressure to become the best person, both internally and externally, that one can be for the good of society'. Correspondingly, many normative components, such as mutual respect, reciprocity and the pursuit of relational harmony, also constitute core norms that underpin China's role conception and purposive actions on the

⁷⁶ Throughout history, there have been many occasions when, in order for the regime to survive, ancient Chinese dynasties had to be obsequious to perceived barbarians, many of whom came from Mongolia and Middle Asia.

foreign relations front. In other words, China's struggle for recognition involves some righteous and credible aspects.

First, being endowed with the moral values that emphasise coexistence with others and stability of relationships, the pursuit for a superior China is believed to be not a battle over the zero-sum resource of social status but more **a sense of cooperation for achieving harmony in relationships**. China never shows any interest in monopolising the status of being a great power. During the process of struggle for recognition, in fact, it performs many considerate actions to maintain and promote relational closeness with other actors and demonstrates a keen consciousness of respecting the others' recognition needs as well. Very often, China is a passionate actor, which would like to fulfil its duty of offering its recognition to others.

Second, **the mediating effects of face culture make China's international image and behaviour less assertive and more defensive**. For the Chinese, public criticism should be avoided as such behaviour can make both sides lose face. Specifically, the safest way to guard against the loss of face would be to reduce the possibility of public conflict or debate. As we have seen so far, China does not desire reputation maximisation as much as conflict minimisation. Apart from some diplomatic crises, face culture always prompts China to seek the 'proper' way to avoid any involvement in a direct and public confrontation. China's ideas and behaviours very often represent a self-disciplined image, which consistently emphasises the necessity of preserving both self's and other's face. For example, over the past several decades, 'China's increasing interest in rehabilitating its international reputation kept it from openly confronting the West' (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2007, p. 41). As described by Wang

Hongying (2003, p. 62), 'publicly, Beijing took a strong position defending its stand against sanctions imposed by Western countries... Privately, however, pragmatic leaders tried to avoid a confrontational policy against the United States' (Wang, 2003, p. 62).

Third, China seeks to be recognised as a major power worthy of trust and cooperation.

This study has repeatedly argued the Chinese rule of *renqing*: 'A normal relationship does not require symmetry of partners or equality of exchanges, but it does require reciprocity' (Jorgensen & Wong, 2016, p. 65). Closely related to the reciprocal principle, the Chinese logic of dealing with international recognition is quite explicable: if I give you face, you should give me face in return; if you give me face, I will actively give you the same or a greater amount in return. This research has shown that foreign leaders generally have sufficient trust in China's credentials—they are certain that their praise, hospitality and discreet diplomatic actions will get them what they want from China.

Meanwhile, it should be remembered that, under the influence of face culture, **China is unlikely to become an altruist or moral perfectionist.**

First of all, **China's struggle for recognition still safeguards a strictly hierarchical and explicitly inegalitarian society.** On the one hand, China orally positions itself as 'a sovereign state in the strict Westphalian sense' (Zhang, 2010, p. 281), which vocally prioritises the principle of sovereign equality as a basic norm in international relations. President Xi Jinping (as cited in *Chinese Foreign Ministry*, 2015) has said, 'politically, China supports equality among all countries, big or small'. On the other hand, China seizes every possible opportunity to show

itself as a key decision-maker in global affairs, the focus of global attention and an exceptional country that is inherently different from other Western 'hegemons'. No doubt, it truly 'enjoys the symbols of being a major power' (Shambaugh, 2014), and many of China's behaviours in fact fit a much wider pattern of disregarding its claimed pursuit of equality among nations. The international relationship envisioned by China's role conception as a major power is as Qin Yaqing (2010, p. 42) notes, 'not that between the animals in the Hobbesian jungle, equal and hostile; not that between the humans in the Lockean society, equal and competitive; not even that between the states in the Kantian culture, equal and friendly. Rather, it was that between the father and sons in the Confucian family, unequal but benign'.

Second, **China's behaviours are displayed and conducted in a distinctly transactional way.**

Beneath the veneer of harmony and politeness, there are invariably realistic considerations, calculation and manipulation. As a barrage of international criticism points out, China tends to transform the issue of recognition into a transaction, which only pays heed to short-term interests and occasional amusement among nations. As one interviewee (Interview 2) revealed, international recognition can be described as merely a 'technical matter', which seems to have nothing to do with an actor's inherent values and beliefs and can always be achieved or solved by means of 'mutual benefit and win-win results' [Chinese: 互利共赢].⁷⁷

Third, although beneficial for relational stability, **avoidance of public criticism and conflict deafens the Chinese government and public to what others really perceive and think about China** (c.f., Scott, 2015, p. 261). In fact, there are philosophical Chinese proverbs like

⁷⁷ 'Mutual benefit and win-win results' is a core diplomatic principle that China always emphasises in its diplomatic discourse.

listen to one side you will be enlightened, heed only one side you will be benighted [Chinese: 兼听则明, 偏信则暗], but out of face concern, they still like to heed the favourable side in international situations. Obviously, de-criticism efforts inevitably lead to the 'great power autism', which makes it more difficult for Chinese people to understand alternative visions of how the world works and how societies should be organised (Westad, 2012, p. 5). It will also result in a paradox —the struggle for international recognition ultimately causes more loss of international recognition.

To sum up, China's face diplomacy intended for it to be seen as a major power proves Solé-Farra's observation of the Chinese national characteristics: 'Absolute distinctions such as those indicated by the "either-or" point of view do not meet with the approval of the Chinese mind; accordingly, the Chinese can be at one and the same time both extremely idealistic and extremely realistic' (Solé-Farràs, 2016, p. 12). As such, the role conception of a 'benign major power' also reflects this reconfiguration between idealism and realism, between the moral self-consciousness mainly embedded in Confucianism and the Chinese exceptionalism of 'the Superior'.

4.5.4 Behavioural characteristics

There is a widespread belief that China's diplomacy has a particularly elusive nature, which often seems baffling and hard to predict. In spite of this, one could nonetheless argue that China has some repetitious and predictable ways in which it maintains its face:

- Compared with many other countries, China focuses too much on the symbols rather than the substance of diplomacy.
- China likes using economical means and financial assets to purchase recognition.
- In the process of diplomacy, China tends to highlight its achievements but to solve conflicts discreetly.
- Face-threatening moves or seemingly assertive actions are a primary source of China's worries. With regard to diplomatic issues, the Chinese are intensely sensitive to fine details and can easily scale up a conflict if they believe they have not received the recognition they expected.
- In diplomatic crises, especially in the early stages, it is difficult for China to make concessions. There is always a compelling need to wipe out and reverse its loss of face.

4.5.5 Multiple factors influencing face culture

For a state, the struggle for international recognition must be mediated by competition among various ideational factors. It is a basic truth that multiple motivational factors simultaneously coexist and jointly determine China's struggle for favourable acknowledgement. This means that the degree to which face culture affects China's diplomacy is not only determined by the culture itself but also depends on many other dynamics. Especially in the political process, we can see that Chinese face culture is combined with or absorbed by some political and

ideological elements.

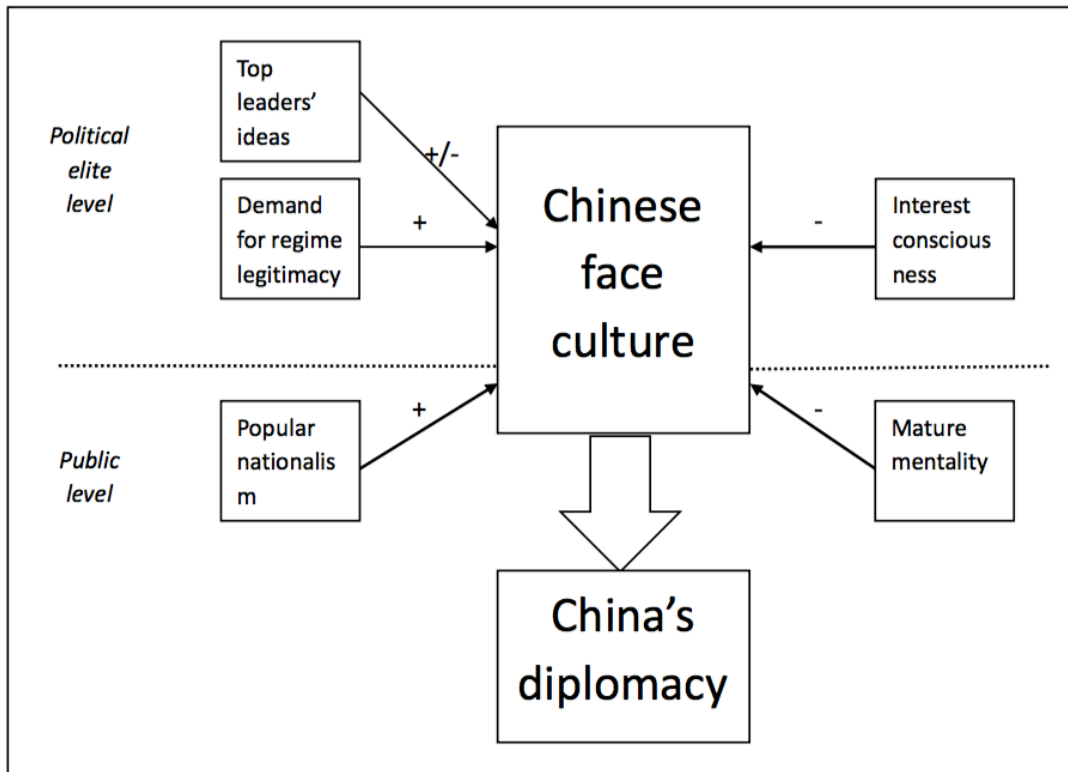


Figure 4.7. Various factors affecting face culture in Chinese diplomacy.⁷⁸

Senior leaders' ideas.

Given the nature of China's political regime, senior Chinese leaders' ideas about face form the basis of China's face diplomacy. If the senior-most Chinese leader has a strong awareness of face culture, he or she will very possibly emphatically consider international recognition and conduct facework in diplomatic issues. Conversely, if the leader is practical and is less concerned with external validation, the prevalence of China's face diplomacy is likely to fade

⁷⁸ '+' refers to a positive correlation; '-' refers to a negative correlation.

away. For observers, the current problem is that it is not easy to recognise which way President Xi Jinping leans.

Based on a comparison between him and his predecessor Hu Jintao, this thesis tends to believe that President Xi has a relatively strong sense of face. Since President Hu's term, China has invested substantial resources in public diplomacy and many national-level image-enhancement projects. Meanwhile, we can also note that Hu always emphasises the necessity of expressing a relatively objective national image to the world. In China's 2003 national propaganda work meeting, Hu claimed, 'we should introduce the developments of China's socialist material, spiritual and political civilization to the world *comprehensively and objectively*' (*Xinhua*, 2003). The then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (2007) made the same point in a 2007 article: for external propaganda to work, 'we should introduce China's reform, opening-up and modernization drive to the world comprehensively, accurately and timely, and *should not sidestep our country's problems*'. As a Taiwanese scholar commented, 'the management of national image in Hu's terms embodied the characteristics of rationality, pragmatism and mildness' (Chen, 2015, p. 77).

During President Xi's term, it can be easily seen that his arguments about China's role conception as a major power have become more ambitious. In 2013, Xi proposed the objective of 'The Four Images of a Major Power'. He pointed out that the international image of contemporary China should be those of 'a civilisation', 'a big Oriental country', 'a responsible great power' and 'the great socialist nation' (*People Daily*, 2013). More remarkably, in 2014's central conference on work relating to foreign affairs, Xi stressed that China should develop a

distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role of a major country. He argues, 'we should, on the basis of summing up our past practice and experience, enrich and further develop principles guiding our diplomatic work, and conduct diplomacy with a salient Chinese feature and a Chinese vision' (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2014). From these changes in his arguments, it can be inferred that President Xi is more eager to show China's superiority and to gain the world's respect.

Demand for regime legitimacy

As one interviewee notes, 'China's leaders today do not really care about genuine international recognition, as they know that no matter how hard they work, China will still remain an alien for many countries. In this situation, China could be satisfied with surface recognition and just makes itself seem like a recognised country to its domestic citizens'. In many cases, China's face diplomacy is actually intended more to gain domestic legitimacy. At the political elite level, the demands for the CCP's regime legitimacy are positively associated with face culture, with both having been often integrated in the minds of decision-makers or diplomats. Theoretically speaking, lacking the legitimacy conferred by competitive elections, authoritarian leaders are more likely than democratic leaders to transpose the external legitimacy to their internal legitimation (Deng, 2008, p. 28). For contemporary China, seeking the 'confirmation of the success of the party-state' (Noesselt, 2014, p. 30) has been routinised as an overriding policy objective of Beijing's diplomacy. When the needs for regime legitimacy become stronger, face

culture will naturally be able to play a greater role China's attentiveness to and construction of its role conception as a major power.

Simultaneously, the CCP's quest for legitimacy has been orientated towards the revival of numerous traditional cultural elements of Chinese culture (Holbig & Gilley, 2010, p. 21). Just like Thomas Christensen's argument (1996, p. 37), 'since the Chinese Communist Party is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese'. In this milieu, face culture also becomes an important cultural reference for Chinese authorities to make their struggles for recognition meet the expectation of the Chinese people.

Popular nationalism.

At the mass public level, China's popular nationalism and face culture are positively related to each other.

In China, face is never an individual concept. 'Chinese people are concerned not only about enhancing or losing face of one's small self, but also enhancing or losing face of one's big self arising from significant moral and social episodes' (Jackson, 2013, p. 156). Under the influence of nationalism, obviously, the country is the 'significant big self' for many people. In most cases, the two ideational components are completely interwoven into the public opinion basis of China's diplomacy. Safeguarding China's face in any situation is evidently important to the nationalists, and 'an obsession with national face is the hall mark of Chinese nationalists' (Gries & Peng, 2002, p. 177). The analysis in Section 4.3 shows that the Chinese public opinion often

manifests as an excessive appeal for international recognition, hyper-sensitivity to foreign criticism or offences and emotional responses to negative feedback, all of which are embedded in its face culture and can also be regarded as a kind of nationalism.

Constraints.

Meanwhile, there are also two constraints to circumscribing the effects of face culture.

First, at the political elite level, interest-orientated pragmatism trumps consciousness for face. Interviewees in this study generally believe that face diplomacy is only one part of their overall diplomatic endeavours, and their work still serves substantial interest and is not simply meant to gain superficial recognition.

Second, although Chinese people are traditionally face-conscious, many of them have started to increasingly adopt a practical attitude towards face. As illustrated in Section 4.3, many people tend to evaluate the gain or loss of face diplomacy critically, not focusing on international recognition.

In many studies, the conceptualisation of the role of the domestic public in China's diplomacy tends to be problematic and static. The Chinese people are frequently stigmatised as a unitary whole—either the silent majority or the naïve nationalists—who are easily manipulated by Chinese authorities or controlled by the sentiments of nationalism. Some scholars consciously or unconsciously neglect today's progressively diversified Chinese society and a large group of Chinese citizens who have a relatively mature approach towards the world and themselves.

Undoubtedly, 'China as a major power' is a common quest of international recognition for the Chinese people; however, many have begun to reflect on the true meaning of this objective and on what such a struggle would cost China. As shown in Section 4.3.4, when China shows off its power, generosity or so-called 'friendliness' to some foreign countries, it is always met with public doubt, criticism or aversion to its face diplomacy. When a foreign country gives us face, some people do not feel pride but worry about the cost. These public opinions, to some extent, can be taken into account by decision-makers and further constrain China's face diplomacy to a certain degree.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ One case in point is from one interviewee in this survey: 'When Beijing was holding the 2014 APEC and then bid for the Winter Olympics, the Beijing media was required to not spread a lot of high-profile propaganda, as the authorities had sensed that the public was tired of and even had many complaints about this series of international events that disrupted their daily lives'. In addition, it is easy to find many reports and comments in China's official newspapers responding to the public criticism to face diplomacy, all of which reveals that the Chinese authorities are conscious of reducing or concealing some of their face behaviours.

Chapter 5

Behavioural Pattern II: A Multifaceted China in Front of the EU

我们算是一个大国，这个大国又是一个小国。

—邓小平

*'We should count as a great power,
but this great power is also a small power.'*

—Deng Xiaoping

5.1 Research Framework

5.1.1 Research questions and assumptions

The core question we pose in Chapter 6 is 'how does face culture affect how China presents itself before other major powers in order to gain their recognition?' The research results presented so far have fully demonstrated that face culture is a cultural construct within which international perceptions of China and its diplomatic behaviours are forged. This chapter will further adapt these findings to create an explanatory framework that will shed light on China's struggle for recognition from others it considers major powers.

According to a cultural analysis of this research, there is another model through which Chinese

seek face:

Behavioural pattern II: When one perceives oneself at the same or at an inferior status in an interaction, one tends to present oneself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart when seeking recognition.

This leads to an assumption about China's diplomatic activities aimed at gaining international recognition:

Behavioural pattern II: When China perceives itself at the same or at an inferior status in an interaction, it tends to present itself as an acquaintance, weak and as a counterpart when seeking international recognition.

According to the behaviour model proposed in Chapter 3, it is postulated that, in its struggle for international recognition by the major powers, China performs three complementary role conceptions—the acquaintance, the weak and the counterpart—that lead to a matrix of international images and role behaviours.

China's role conception	China's role performance
The Acquaintance	Use interpersonal salutations to describe each other and to develop a relationship
The Weak	Highlight one's own disadvantages and status as inferior

The Counterpart	Depict oneself as the same kind of international actor as the other major powers.
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Figure 5.1. Hypotheses of the model of China’s struggle for recognition from major powers.

Based on the approach of role theory, an empirical analysis will be conducted to validate the above assumptions in the model presented in Figure 5.1 and to examine the significance of face culture. The following two sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 will outline the case selection and data resources. Sections 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 will then, respectively, present the empirical findings on these three role conceptions, and Section 5.5 will provide an overall summary.

5.1.2 Case selection

It can be observed that Chinese decision-makers, scholars and the general public commonly value the EU as a major power, which has a higher or equal status compared with China. Additionally, China has a lot of demands and constantly seeks recognition from Europe. All of this ensures that there was enough empirical proof to conduct this study.

This section will present three key reasons why China’s EU diplomacy is suitable as a case study for this research, while revealing the current mainstream Chinese perceptions of the EU as whole.

1. The EU as a major power: From a strategic perspective.

There is 'a remarkable homogeneity, uniformity and conformity in [the] Chinese perceptions of Europe and Sino-European relations' (Shambaugh, 2007, p. 128). Generally, the Chinese have a more ideal viewpoint of the EU's strategic position in the world than the Europeans themselves.

Perceptions of China's decision makers

From the beginning, the EU and its leading member states (namely, Britain, France and Germany) have belonged to the category of China's 'Great Power Diplomacy'. The term 'Great Power Diplomacy' [Chinese: 大国外交] originally appeared in official discourses during the Jiang Zemin period (from the early 1990s to the early 2000s) and is still widely used in Chinese diplomacy today. Although Beijing has never given a clear definition or elaboration of this term, it is generally believed that America, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the EU are categorised as China's perceived 'great powers'. The following empirical analysis will also reveal more about Chinese leaders' understanding of the EU's status.

Perceptions of Chinese scholars

Chinese scholars have overly generalised ideas about the EU's position, tending to depict it as an independent and complete pole in the international arena. Although they note the difficulty in forging a consensus within the expanded EU system, 'there is still a strong propensity to view the EU as a single unitary entity acting with common purpose on the international stage'

(Shambaugh, 2007, pp. 128-129).

According to some Chinese academic arguments, the EU has been a reasonably adequate partner to develop a multi-polar global order, to counter American hegemony. The underlying logic is that the importance and independence of the EU are bound to contribute to the emerging world multi-polarisation, which is beneficial for China's rise under the pressure of American hegemony (Zhu, 2007, p. 154). Shambaugh notes that Chinese academic views of Europe's role in the world 'largely derive from [the] broader Chinese understanding of, and preferences for, the global system and order' (Shambaugh, 2007, p. 128). Zhu Liqun admits that 'there is a lot of wishful thinking going on in Chinese scholarly circles and a strong tendency to project Chinese wishes for global order on to what they perceive to be European "realities"' (Zhu, 2007, p. 149). Such cognitive dissonance easily leads Chinese academics to overstate the EU's power and advantages and to understate its disadvantages.

Perceptions of the Chinese public and elite.

In China, public knowledge about the EU mainly comes from state-controlled television, newspapers and the Internet (Dong, 2013, p. 238), so it is not surprising that Chinese public opinion about the EU is to a large extent in line with the country's official position.

According to a 2010 survey entitled *Chinese view of the EU*,⁸⁰ the Chinese general public chose

⁸⁰ This research project was led by the China Policy Institute of the University of Nottingham and funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Program. Two large-scale surveys were conducted between June and August in 2010 to investigate in detail what the Chinese people think of the EU. One sampled 3019 respondents among the registered residents of six big Chinese cities in

the EU as the third most influential political actor, only following the United States and China, and the Chinese elite believes that the EU could rank second in world politics, which would make it more important than China and only a little less important than the United States (Li & Ying, 2013, p. 20). In the global economic realm, both the Chinese public and its elite choose the EU as the second most influential actor (Ibid.). Another research also discovers that, when compared with similar surveys conducted before the European debt crisis, the proportion of the Chinese public viewing the EU as a world power still shows an upward trend, and an absolute majority of Chinese people agree that China should cooperate more closely with the EU (Dong, 2013, p. 238).

2. The EU as a major power: From the value perspective

In fact, Chinese people view the EU as a superior, not only because of its material power and strategic significance but also due to their positive perception of European values, models and norms (Harnish, 2015, p. 143).

While China claims to be constructing a new global order, China's international behaviours largely mirror the Western worldviews and consistently show its unspoken desire to become a member of the 'Western Club' (Dams & Paul, 2015).⁸¹ As an illustration, the past few decades

order to explore the public perception of the EU; the other surveyed members of five elite groups about their views, including 222 governmental officials, 203 entrepreneurs, 100 scholars, 123 media workers and 134 NGO activists (Li & Ying, 2013, pp. 5-6). The results of the surveys and their analyses were published in the book *China and European Union* (Dong, Wang, & Dekker, 2011).

⁸¹ Chinese scholar Wang Hui (2011) expresses a similar viewpoint: 'PRC China's opening-up policy is just from a one-way

have witnessed China firmly seeking integration with the current international regimes and showing a profound interest in ensuring that international rules and institutions function effectively (Geeraerts, 2013, p. 9). Across a wide range of issues, China is acting more like an established great power than a revisionist one, as it is well aware that the liberal international order in fact 'provides it with greater benefits than if it tries to change this order' (Ikenberry, 2014, p. 56).

Among the great powers or, more specifically, between America and the EU, the latter is undoubtedly a more favourable referent for China when embracing Western values. In the eyes of the Chinese, America's China policy is 'engagement plus containment', but the EU emphasises cooperation instead of competition and seldom takes any so-called 'hegemonic actions' against China⁸² (Men, 2006, p. 804; Song, 2001). Consequently, even in the field of human rights, the EU is seen as a more reliable dialogue partner, which can cope with divergence in a way that is neither confrontational nor loud (Chen, 2003; Harnish, 2015, p. 153). Nowadays, the implications of the European models are comprehensive and profound. Specifically, 'from the domestic political and social development and China's preference in international affairs, we can see the silhouette of the European models' (Song, 2010, p. 755). Odgaard and Biscop (2006, p. 11) note that 'EU multilateral policies are seen as a role model by China', especially with regard to conflict resolution and the non-use of force. Liu Xige (2003, p. 29) claims that 'the successful experience of the European model is used as a reference for China's own foreign

opening (to the Soviet Union and its camp) to another one-way opening, i.e., the opening towards the West'.

⁸² 'Hegemonic action' is a frequently occurring political term in China, used by the Chinese government or media to describe the interference of the Western powers in the affairs of other countries.

policy'. Zhu Liqun (2007, p. 155) believes that China understands the EU more from the perspective of its own development, hoping to use its experiences as a point of reference.

According to Zhu Liqun's survey of 550 Chinese university students in 2007, Chinese youngsters think highly of the EU's significance to China and appreciate the European model over the US model in the sphere of international relations. One representative result is cited below (Zhu 2007, p. 162):

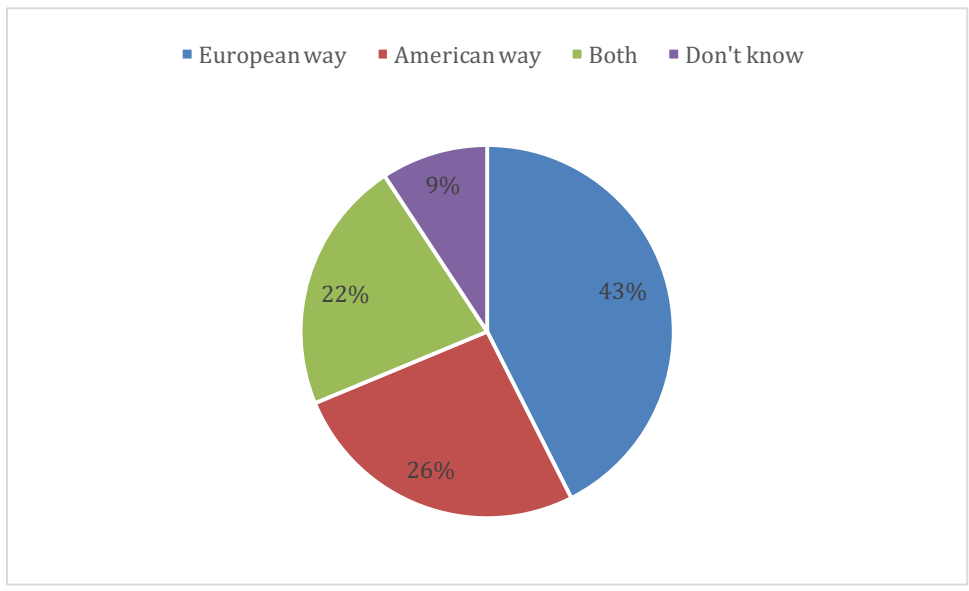


Figure 5.2. Answers to the question, 'Which is the better model to follow when dealing with international affairs?'

The survey data of the study, *The Chinese View of the EU*, shows that, in comparison to other big powers in the world, Chinese people like the EU the most (Li & Ying, 2013, p. 17), 'holding an overwhelming positive view of the EU's role in world peace, international economy, environmental protection, scientific progress, fighting poverty in the world and fighting

international terrorism' (ibid., p. 35).

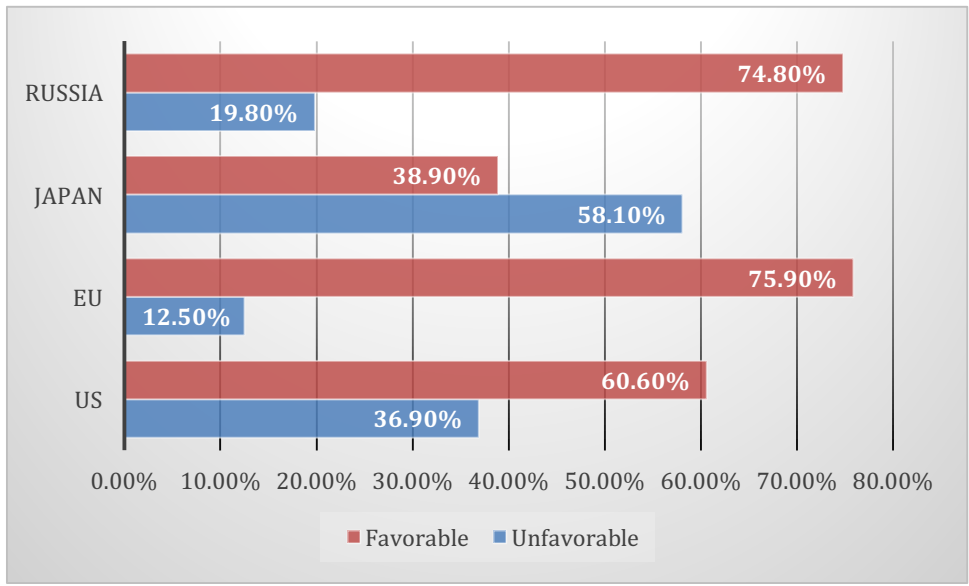


Figure 5.3. The Chinese public's attitude towards major world powers.

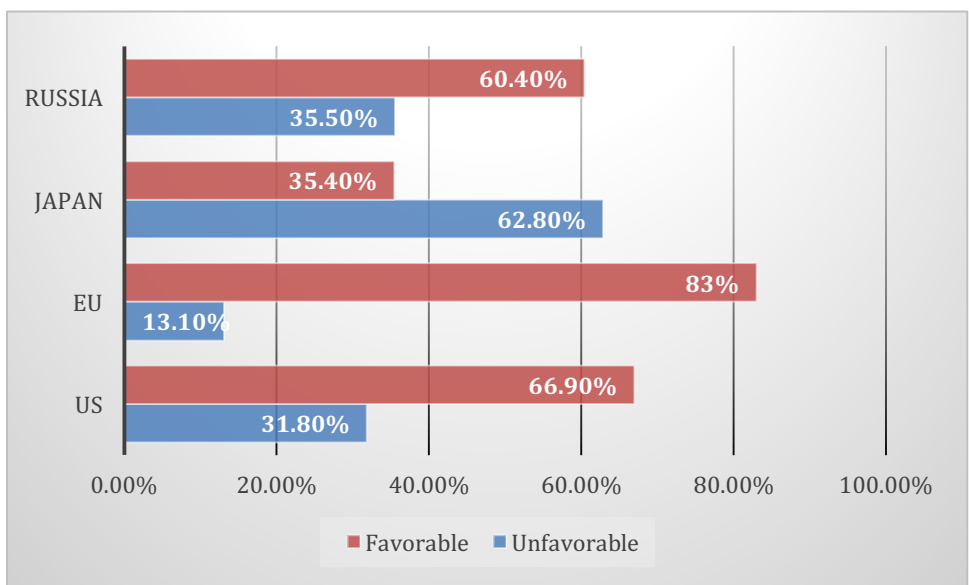


Figure 5.4. The Chinese elite's attitude towards major powers.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the Chinese perspective of the EU has always been complex, fluid and multiple, never formed in a consistent and aggregate way.

In recent decades, Chinese perceptions of the EU have undergone some significant changes. The year 2008 is generally regarded as a turning point for Sino-European relations, when 'ideology and differences on some specific issues are increasingly straining bilateral relations' (Li, 2016, p. 25). 'There has been remarkable frustration within Chinese foreign policy circles that the EU is increasingly becoming more difficult to placate and that the previous economic diplomacy seems less effective now' (Ibid.). Many Chinese people also have a strong aversion to the 'normative superiority' based on the EU's normative power identity. For example, 'the EU's effort to uphold human rights has even been read as evidence of a persistent Cold War and imperialist mentality seeking to subjugate China' (Jørgensen & Reuben, 2016, p. 59).

After the Eurozone's debt crisis, Beijing obviously felt more confident and positive in steering the orientation of its bilateral relationship. According to Nicola Casarini (2012, p. 47), 'Chinese leaders are today, for the first time in modern history, in the position to take advantage of the West's economic woes while also lecturing European policy makers on their economic and fiscal policies'. Some observers believe that the significance of the EU in the Chinese mind is declining. Szczudlik-Tatar (2015, p. 7) believes that, despite China still claiming that the EU is an important strategic partner, 'it seems that it is playing a lesser role in China's diplomacy than before the crisis and is still perceived more as an economic partner than a political power to be reckoned with'. In China's official media reports, the image of Europe has been tightly connected with the words 'bankrupt', 'unemployment', 'decline' and 'poverty'. Influenced by such media fuelling, it is very natural that Chinese people have the impression that China is experiencing a rapid rise while the Europe is facing intractable problems, and a power

realignment between these two actors is doomed to take place.

3. Political divergence and self-presentation to relationship.

The author believes that the implications of face culture can play a remarkable role in China’s diplomacy with the EU, largely because China has to circumvent the EU’s expectations and to rely on self-presentation to relationship to gain European recognition.

China and the EU share a wide variety of common interests and viewpoints, but there are still many misalignments. The most troubling aspect is that ‘the Sino-EU relationship has “never” surpassed the difficulties caused by different ideologies and values’ (Huo, 2005, p. 1). Both sides have realised that ‘these differences are not matters to be resolved easily by relying on common interests’ (Stanzel, 2007, p. 262), and any individual case associated with values can easily grow into a conspicuously disruptive factor in their bilateral relation.

Issue	The EU’s approach	China’s approach
Sovereignty ⁸³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Limited and relative rights. · Europeans prefer to interpret sovereignty more as <i>accountabilities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Absolute, inseparable, entitled rights · China seems to cling to the most traditional understanding, making

⁸³ Chinese scholar Pan Zhongqi (2013, p. 31) has summarised this in an interesting way: ‘Historically, sovereignty was what Europeans invented and what the Chinese were forced to accept; today it is what Europeans try to bury and what the Chinese still hold dear’.

	than as <i>rights</i> .	independence and non-intervention the core diplomatic principles.
Human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Civil and political rights · Europeans value individual rights. · Human rights outweigh sovereignty, and it is necessary to restrict state sovereignty to protect human rights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Economic and social rights · China values collective rights. · State sovereignty is the prerequisite for and the foundation of human rights.
Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The EU emphasises the universality of democracy, including some critical concepts e.g. fair competitive election, rule of law and free civil society. · Process of democratisation could involve external interference or pressure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Chinese authorities emphasise its unique path to democracy with Chinese characteristics and advocates expanding citizens' political participation in an orderly way. · China will not democratise in an American or European way, and any democratic improvement cannot threaten the rule of the CCP
Strategic partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Europeans tend to pursue clarity in common strategic objectives and values. · More attention is paid to the current problems or divergences. · The EU wants China to be a <i>multilateral</i> partner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Chinese pursues stability of relationships and the principle of seeking common ground while having certain differences. · China regards the EU as a <i>multipolar</i> partner.

<p>Multipolarity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The EU member states have different viewpoints about multipolarity. · Europeans focus on the destabilising potential of emerging powers and a power shift from West to East. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · China focuses on its rise as a pole. · Multipolarity is a historical inevitable trend, conducive to the peace and stability of the world.
<p>Multilateralism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Effective multilateralism. · Adherence to, and advocacy of, international law and institutions. · An indispensable aspect of European values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Practical multilateralism · China emphasises the dominant position of the sovereign state and is less committed to a rule-based international system than the EU. · Multilateralism is an important means of promoting multipolarity.

Figure 5.5. Divergent political values between China and the EU.

In the eyes of many Europeans, a world ruled by China would be an explicit departure from Western norms, standards and experiences (Jacques, 2010). The EU and its member states always desire and attempt to transform China, ‘helping China understand and observe international norms, improving the rule of law in China, and encouraging the Chinese government to respect human rights and political pluralism’ (Li, 2016, p. 14).

However, due to the value divergences between both sides, China shows no interest in meeting many of the European expectations. In an open speech, Catherine Ashton admitted that the EU

could do little to change Chinese society, and ‘China will not match EU standards of human rights and rule of law for some time to come’ (as cited in *Euobserver*, 2010). In a 2009 policy report published by the European Council on Foreign Relations, the EU’s China strategy has been described as ‘anachronistic’ (Fox & Godement, 2009, p. 16). ‘China has paid little heed to European values and today Beijing regularly contravenes or even undermines them’ (Ibid.).⁸⁴ Meanwhile, observers generally believe that ‘with its rise, China is more and more likely to adhere [to] its own values’ (Wang, 2011; see also, Geeraerts, 2016; Jørgensen & Reuben, 2016, p. 59).

How to gain the EU’s recognition while remaining destined to fall short of European expectations represents a tough challenge for Chinese decision-makers. As a method, self-presentation to relationship inevitably becomes one important alternative that can be characterised as not only a product of cultural consciousness but also a rational choice based on political realities.

In line with the above theoretical discussion, the following chapter will investigate China’s role conception as an acquaintance, weak and a counterpart of the EU in its struggle for recognition. It will seek to trace the complex process of role conception and construction of China vis-à-vis the EU and to outline the empirical proof of its resulting role performances. Considered together, the Chinese leaders’ and diplomats’ rhetoric, the formal official statements of China

⁸⁴ Some scholars believe that the EU has failed to transform China and to a certain degree has been transformed by China. Feng Zhongping (2013, p. 42) notes, ‘the most prominent adjustment of the EU’s policy towards China was that pragmatism was widely accepted as an important principle in conducting intercourse with China’. Holslag (2010) claims that ‘the interest replacement idea has been accepted by EU authorities’.

and the EU and the observable diplomatic behaviours all point to the plausibility of the evidence of China’s role performance.

5.1.3 Data sources

The qualitative data for this research has been drawn from the Chinese political elite’s official statements from 2008 to 2015. This period includes former President Hu Jintao’s second term (2008-2012) and the first three years of President Xi Jinping’s first term (2013-2015).

‘Political elite’ here refers to the politicians and officials who currently hold or have held the post of China’s President, Premier, Chairman of National Congress, State Councillor responsible for foreign affairs, Foreign Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the EU, ASEAN and AU, during the period 2008-2015. For the readers’ convenience, Figure 5.6 lists the specific persons. Needless to say, they are the decision-makers of China’s diplomacy, who can be regarded as the primary performers of China’s national role conceptions.⁸⁵ Moreover, in most situations, they have the unrestrained authority to pursue their preferred policies and dominate the domestic political discourse, which greatly reduces the role conflicts that frequently occur in the decision-making process of Western regimes.

	Premier	Chairman	State	Foreign	Vice	Ambassador
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⁸⁵ A related theoretical discussion is in Section 2.5.

		of National Congress	Councillor	Minister	Foreign Minister⁸⁶	to the EU, ASEAN or AU⁸⁷
President Hu Jintao's second term (2008-2012)	Wen Jiabao	Wu Bangguo	Dai Bingguo	Yang Jiechi	Fu Ying Song Tao	Song Zhe Wu Hailong Xue Hanqin Tong Xiaoling
President Xi Jinping's first term (2012-2015)	Li Keqiang	Zhang Dejiang	Yang Jiechi	Wang Yi	Wang Chao Liu Zhenmin Zhang Ming	Wu Hailong Yang Yanyi Yang Xiuping Xu Bu Kuang Weilin

Figure 5.6. Members of the Chinese political elite chosen for this study.

It should be noted that this chapter investigates China's diplomatic discourse not only in the context of the EU but also the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asia) and the AU (African Union). The previous section explained that, to the Chinese, the EU is one of the very few major powers whose international status is higher than its own. Obviously, although Beijing treats the

⁸⁶ Conventionally, there are always 6-8 officials serving as the Deputy Minister of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. This study only focuses on those who are responsible for European, African or Asian affairs.

⁸⁷ Since 2001, China has sent an ambassador to the EU, and, so far, four diplomats have occupied this post. In 2008, Xue Hanqin was appointed as the first ambassador to the ASEAN. In 2015, Kuang Weilin served as the first ambassador to the AU.

ASEAN and the AU countries as 'equal' partners on paper, it never actually views them as major powers and more often still plays the role of 'Big Brother' before them. In this sense, if the hypothesis of this research is true, then China's role performance before the EU—its perceived superior—should be eminently different from its performance to the ASEAN and the AU—its perceived inferiors. A comparative study of this is expected to augment research credibility and reveal the saliency of face culture.

Consequently, statements made by members of the political elite include their discourse relating to the EU, ASEAN and AU in formal speeches, diplomatic conversations, press interviews, printed articles etc. All the data are publicly available in digitalised form, mainly obtained from the websites of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Missions of China to the EU, ASEAN and AU and Xinhua News Agency. The study involves collecting discourse materials of 1,95,000 Chinese characters about the EU, 1,03,000 about the ASEAN and 92,000 about the AU.

Nvivo software was used as the key research tool throughout the process of data collection and analysis.⁸⁸ It was used to extract concrete discourses that match different role conceptions and to present the proportion of related discourses for a comparative study.

5.2 Acquaintances and Partners

Chapter 3 revealed that Chinese people tend to play the role of acquaintance when seeking face from their superiors. It is believed that such a role conception can be transformed into a useful

⁸⁸ Nvivo software was operated in strict accordance with Bazeley and Jackson's textbook *Qualitative Data Analysis with Nvivo*.

'voucher' to gain social recognition. One common practice is to refer to a relationship using intimate titles that are designed to exaggerate and essentially promote relational closeness.

'Only a few articles have tried to understand the underlying dynamics of the Sino-EU partnership by focusing on the level of ideas and perceptions' (Kumar, 2012, p. 5). This section tries to demonstrate that whether and why China's role conception as *acquaintance* lead to presentations as *partner*. Moreover, how does this manifest its face culture--isn't this a manifestation of face culture?

5.2.1 Distinctiveness of the title 'partner'

Partner or *partnership* has been a popular conceptual and policy tool available to international actors, 'which is perceived by these actors as somehow legitimate and useful in the pursuit of their foreign policy goals' (Feng & Huang, 2014, p. 37). Simultaneously, views and practices regarding this concept always vary from country to country.

The Chinese word 'partner' [伙伴], according to the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (CASS, 1997, p. 576), refers to those who have joined the same organisation or are engaged in the same activities. To the Chinese, this word is synonymous with 'acquaintance' [熟人], which can broadly refer to various interpersonal relationships, including friend, lover, colleague, classmate or someone with whom you have just had brief contact. There is no clear semantic boundary in Chinese to clarify what exact kind of actors can qualify as 'partner', and such ambiguity or elasticity grants language users the power of individual interpretation. In light of

this, China's preference for this term has an emic cultural basis.

'The concept of "partnership" emerged within Chinese diplomacy after the end of the Cold War' (Feng & Huang, 2014, p. 1). In 1993, China established its first partnership with Brazil. Initially, China's partnership diplomacy showed a distinct preference towards major or regional powers.⁸⁹ Since the early 2000s, partnership diplomacy has constituted one of the most notable dimensions of China's multi-faceted diplomacy, which is perceived by Beijing as a legitimate and useful tool for the conceptualisation of bilateral relations and the pursuit of its foreign policy goals (Ibid.). In December 2014, Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that China's global partnership network had basically taken shape. 'China has established 72 partnerships, of varying forms and degrees, with 67 countries and five regions or regional organizations' (Wang, 2014).⁹⁰ Currently, the common viewpoint of Chinese scholars is that partnership is in fact a kind of normal relationship between or among international actors, 'a denial of the past alliance [of the Cold-War period]' (Wang & Wan, 2013, p. 14; see also Men & Liu, 2015; Zhang, 2016, pp. 41-42). Nguyen (2015, p. 57) summarises the basic connotations of China's partnership in the following way: 'A partnership means that neither party should view the other one as an enemy; the parties need to treat each other with respect and equality; the parties should not intervene in each other's internal affairs; the parties need to coordinate with

⁸⁹ Public information reveals that by 2000, China had established a partnership with 12 countries and international organisations—Brazil (1993), Russia (1994), India (1996), Pakistan (1996), France (1997), America (1997), Canada (1997), the ASEAN (1997), EU (1998), Britain (1998), Japan (1998) and South Korea (1998).

⁹⁰ According to the author's statistics, as of late 2015, China has established partnerships with 78 countries and five regional organisations.

each other to advance their common political and economic interests and they need to support each other in international affairs’.

The rapid development of China-EU relations since the 1990s has seen both sides forging partnerships and positioning each other from a strategic perspective. In 1998, China and the EU established a ‘Constructive Partnership’; in 2002, both sides upgraded it to ‘Comprehensive Partnership’; in 2003, both sides claimed to have established a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’. The period 2003-7 has been commonly regarded as the ‘honeymoon’ period of China-EU relations, which was abruptly followed, since 2008, by a series of mutual disappointments in the context of some key issues. Today, both sides engage with each other more closely and also take a more realistic attitude towards the construction of a partnership (Chen, 2010, pp. 10-11; Renard, 2011, p. 20; Li, 2016, p. 25; Nguyen, 2015, p. 47). Holstag (2011, p. 299) claims that ‘there is thus a marked gap between the proclaimed strategic nature of the Sino-European partnership and the extent to which strategic objectives are defined or translated into concrete policies’.

In line with a comparative study, we can easily find that there is a distinguishing quantitative difference in the arguments about ‘partner’ between China’s discourse towards the EU and those towards the ASEAN and AU (Figure 5.7). Statistics reveal that China, when discussing the EU and Sino-EU relations, devotes much more of its discourse to forging its role as ‘partner’ compared with its discourse with regard to the ASEAN and AU.⁹¹

⁹¹ The calculation was automatically generated by Nvivo software after content encoding.

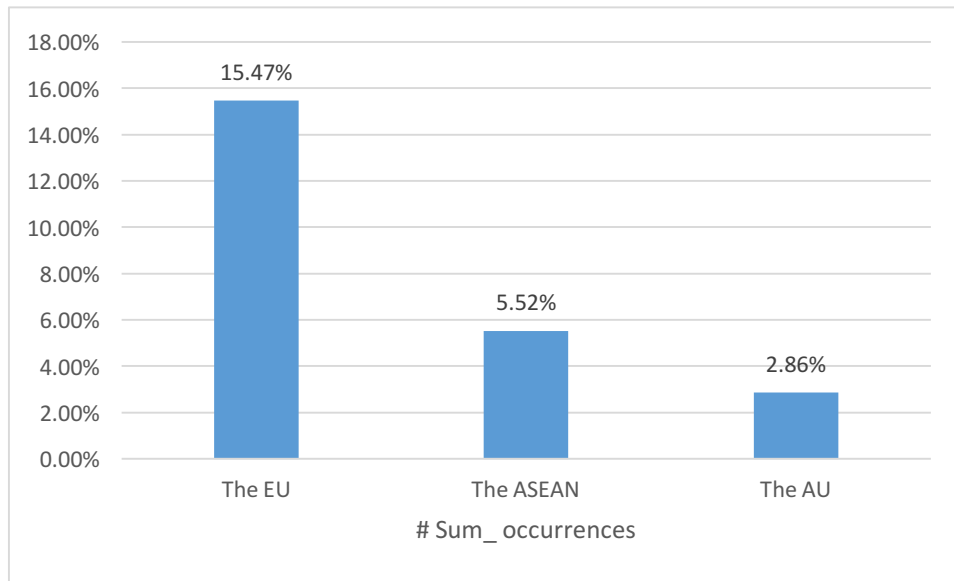


Figure 5.7. Frequency of appearance of the topic ‘partner’ in China’s diplomatic discourse.

In China’s diplomacy, ‘the precise meaning of “partnership” usually differs from one association to another, is subject to different interpretations, and can change over time’ (Feng & Huang, 2014, p. 8). According to the discourse materials, it can be noted that when speaking to the ASEAN and AU, Chinese leaders employ the concepts of ‘partner’ and ‘partnership’ genuinely as a kind of rhetoric embellishment. They are used to mentioning the terms in opening remarks, frequently describing the ASEAN as ‘Good Neighbour, Good Friend, Good Partner’ and the AU as ‘Good Brother, Good Friend, Good Partner’. However, in most cases, there is no specific description to substantiate these proclaimed concepts. There are two typical examples to illustrate this—on 25 March 2013, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech entitled ‘Remaining Reliable Friends and Faithful Partners Forever’ in Tanzania, introducing the policies of China’s new government with regard to Africa and the AU. In this speech of around 5000 words, the

word 'partner' appeared only twice: 'At present, with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and a new type of strategic partnership, China-Africa relations have entered a fast-track of all-round development' (Xi, 2013); '[China] will establish the cooperative partnership of the cross-nation and cross-region infrastructure construction in Africa' (Ibid.). Similarly, in President Xi's speech entitled 'Deepen Cooperative Partnership and Co-build Beautiful Homeland of Asia' delivered in Singapore (Xi, 2015A), despite speaking a lot about China-ASEAN relations, he did not mention the words 'partner' or 'partnership' even once. Some observers claim that China's partner diplomacy seems to be pursued at the rhetoric level in the form of lip service. Its discourse towards the ASEAN and AU reveal that even calling it lip service would be an exaggeration.

Given the amount of discourse shown in Figure 5.7, China shows how important its role as *partner* is with regard to the EU. At first glance, over the past few years, 'partner' and 'partnership' have emerged as the most distinctive words mentioned in the meta-narrative of China's EU diplomacy, permeating almost all its official discourse to Europe, at the bilateral and multilateral levels. This behavioural trend fits the expected performance for the identity of 'acquaintance', namely, borrowing an interpersonal salutation to describe each other and to seek recognition.

Towards the EU, China's discourse of being 'partner' is certainly not a meaningless instrument of diplomatic rhetoric and has noticeably capitalised on three topics: 1) historical review of China-EU relations; 2) conceptualisation of the China-EU strategic partnership; 3) policy statements about China-EU cooperation in various spheres.

The Chinese political elite routinely stresses the rapid evolution of the China-EU partnership in most speeches. Such a discursive strategy, apparently, is aimed at reminding the European audiences that both sides have been 'acquaintances' for a long time. A typical case is cited below, from Yang Yanyi (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2015), the current Ambassador to the EU:

In the past four decades, China-EU relations have experienced ups and downs, but the general trend is positive and forward, and the mainstream is dialogue and cooperation. Since the new century, China-EU relations have represented a stair-like development: from 1998's 'cooperative partner', 2001's 'comprehensive cooperative partner', 2003's 'comprehensive strategic partner' to 2014's comprehensive strategic partner for 'peace, growth, reform and civilization.

The other two kinds of topics will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections, which aim to identify the cultural characteristics embodied in the Chinese discourse.

5.2.2 Conceptualisation of strategic partnership

Being recognised as a strategic partner is an unremitting goal of China's EU diplomacy. Soon after the establishment of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership, David Shambaugh (2004, p. 243) claimed that China and the EU constituted 'an emerging axis in world affairs'. It now appears that this argument is a little exaggeratory. However, like many other diplomatic concepts, the term 'partnership' indeed has its normative components and performative characteristics. Theoretically, languages 'may not only describe the material

world but also can be utilized by speakers to perform a set of particular actions' (Blanco, 2016, p. 43). Through linguistic exchange, actors can constantly position and reposition themselves, create relationships with one another and also establish or modify the rules that govern their relationship (Ibid., pp. 40-44). It can be observed that both China and the EU keep exporting their respective values and expected rules to each other in the discourse framework of their partnership.

At a general level, China's conceptualisation of this notion serves two discursive functions: 1) a description of established fact, embodying some particular attributes pertaining to both sides' interactions, and 2) a formative process of China's normative orientation towards the EU and its bilateral relationship.

The first one is always presented in a descriptive form, noting the on-going cooperation and significance of China-EU relations:

'The establishment of [a] comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the EU is [a] mutually beneficial cooperation between the largest developing country and the largest group of developed countries, friendly exchange between two great ancient civilizations, and candid dialogue between different social systems.'

—Former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao

(Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2009)

'The European Union, either before or after [the] Treaty of Lisbon, has always been

China's vital strategic partner. There are dialogues between China and the EU with diverse forms and high frequency, which are very rare in China's other partnerships.'

—Former Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying

(Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2010)

'The China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership is not only a strategic choice, but also strategic necessity... Under the current situation, the most prominent strategic significance of this partnership is that it has an irreplaceable role in realizing their respective economic and social development goals.'

—Former Chinese ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe (2011A)

'After a 40-year cultivation, [the] China-EU relation has become one of the most important, stable, constructive and influential partnerships in today's world.'

—Vice Foreign Minister Wang Chao (2015)

'It is hard to argue that all strategic partners are of equal or vital importance to China' (Feng & Huang, 2014, p. 8). However, from the statements cited above, it can be concluded that China sincerely wants the EU to believe that it is one of China's priorities in its partnership diplomacy.

The second discursive trend seems more noteworthy in China's partnership narratives in the context of the EU. Beijing struggles for explanatory power regarding the normative values contained in the term 'strategic partnership'. Since the start, Beijing has been unwilling to be a

passive recipient of 'Normative Power Europe'.

As early as 2004, the then Premier Wen Jiabao (2004) put forward China's definition of 'comprehensive strategic partnership':

By 'comprehensive', it means that the cooperation should be all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered. It covers economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural fields, contains both bilateral and multilateral levels, and is conducted by both governments and non-governmental groups. By 'strategic', it means that the cooperation should be long-term and stable, bearing on the larger picture of China-EU relations. It transcends the differences in ideology and social system and is not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur from time to time. By 'partnership', it means that the cooperation should be equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win.

Through a textual analysis as part of this study, I conclude that over the last few decades, China's normative propositions regarding the China-EU partnership still carry forward these ideas. Four recurring keywords can help reveal the core values:

Keyword	Core appeal	Typical statement
Strategicness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· To pursue global-level influence.· To maintain the	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· 'China and the EU should exceed the bilateral range, strengthen cooperation in international affairs, jointly promote

	<p>stability of the bilateral relationship.</p>	<p>multilateralism, participate in the construction of global rules and systems and together shape the post-crisis global pattern and international order.’ (Song, 2010A)</p> <p>· ‘The essence of the China-EU relationship lies in its strategic nature. The China-EU relationship is strategic because our cooperation is long-term, stable and comprehensive. It is not affected by our differences in ideology and social systems. It is not about immediate gains or losses over any particular matter at any particular time. And temporary difficulties and setbacks have never made us lose confidence in our cooperation.’ (Wen Jiabao, as cited in Xinhua News Agency, 2012A)</p>
<p>Comprehensiveness</p>	<p>·To emphasise the objective of all-round cooperation</p>	<p>‘So-called comprehensiveness means that China-EU relations should be all-round, wide-ranging and multi-level... Both sides can conduct extensive dialogue and cooperation in the fields of politics, security, diplomacy, economy and trade, technology, society, culture, political party, military etc.’ (Yang Yanyi, as cited in Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2015)</p>

Mutual advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To pursue mutually beneficial economic benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · '[China and the EU] should place development as a top priority and pursue a path of mutual benefit and common development.' (Wen Jiabao, 2009)
Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To call for mutual respect, stated plainly, and to demand that the Europeans be respectful of China's political system and values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · '[China and the EU] must respect each other's cultural traditions, social systems and ideologies in an open and inclusive spirit.' (Ibid.) · 'China and the EU differ in social systems, cultural background and development stage. It is only natural that we hold different views on some issues. However, the divergences should not affect the main stream of China-EU relations.' (Wu Hailong, 2013)

Figure 5.8. China's normative arguments about the China-EU strategic partnership.

Many European analysts criticise China's (as well as the EU's) phrase 'strategic partnership' for being rather empty: there is neither formal criteria for defining a given third international actor as a strategic partner nor a clear identification of common interests and goals (e.g. Berkofsky, 2005, pp. 14-15; Grevi, 2010, p. 1; Sandschneider, 2009, p. 325; Zhang, 2016, pp. 463-479).⁹²

⁹² This research concurs with Blanco's opinion (2016, p. 40) that many current studies on partnership treat it as a form of organisation, a concept with a single meaning and a set of standard practices, meanwhile neglecting the actual meanings and functions of this term.

The most typical viewpoint is that the Sino-EU strategic partnership is unworthy of a title, 'neither "strategic" nor "partner"' (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 90). The EU practitioners, clearly, do not have a clear and unified understanding of this concept. One EU diplomat has pointed out that (as cited in Rettem, 2010), 'It's like love—no one can define it. You only know what it is when you experience it'.

Figure 5.8 shows that, at the very least, China possesses its own ideological notions about *partnership* and seeks a regulative framework. One thing easily overlooked by people (and often confused by Westerners) is that China's normative expectations are orientated towards the maintenance of a relationship rather than any implicit or explicit conditionality that is applied to define actorhood. Maintaining relational stability and foreseeability becomes China's basic and primary demand from the EU. Among the arguments mentioned, there is almost no unilaterally normative requirement or thought about what kind of actor the EU should be in international society or its interior regions; China only has expectations regarding the common objectives, relational rules and consequences of the relationship between itself and the EU.

In the Chinese mind, 'proper naming is believed to be capable of establishing proper reality' (Jia, 1997, p. 52). China's reliance and emphasis on the term *partner* are consistent with the Chinese epistemological preference of face culture, namely, people often arbitrarily define themselves as an acquaintance and then include anyone they wish to bring into their circle. In most cases, there is no need to clarify what personal quality engenders the materialisation of the identity of *acquaintance* or a clear-cut circumscription separating this identity from others. In much the same way, China labels the EU as a partner and feels satisfied with the EU's

acceptance, but it is never eager to give a clear definition of this title and seems to intentionally maintain a sense of ambiguity in the relational construction.

To sum up, China's pursuit of the EU's recognition as a partner is a typical manifestation of self-presentation to relationship—by giving prominence to the closeness achieved and the maturity of the bilateral relations, by asserting the ambiguous identity of partner in order to establish new webs of meanings that may engender the novel presupposition or positioning between China and the EU. According to China's expectations, if the EU recognises the necessity, state or prospect of developing a strategic partnership with China, the EU would voluntarily reduce or even stop paying attention to China's individual qualities, especially its political system and values that are drastically different from those of the Europeans, and that it would ultimately acknowledge China as a genuinely acceptable partner. At the very least, if only to maintain the existing beneficial elements of their partnership, the EU is expected to repress its hostility or distrust towards China.

5.2.3 Categorisation of partners

China uses the term *partner* to depict specific foreign policies towards the EU, and this phenomenon of its discourse is seldom seen in the context of the ASEAN and AU. This also provides us with a better perspective to analyse the copious political connotations underpinning this concept. The author classifies the related discourses into four categories of policies: Political and Security Partner, Economic Partner, Cultural Partner and Human Rights

Partner. Analysing the frequency of these topics' appearance in its discourse using Nvivo, it can be found that at the content level, there are statistically significant differences among the appearance of these four topics. This is presumably because China just wants to be a partial partner of the EU, not a real, complete partner.

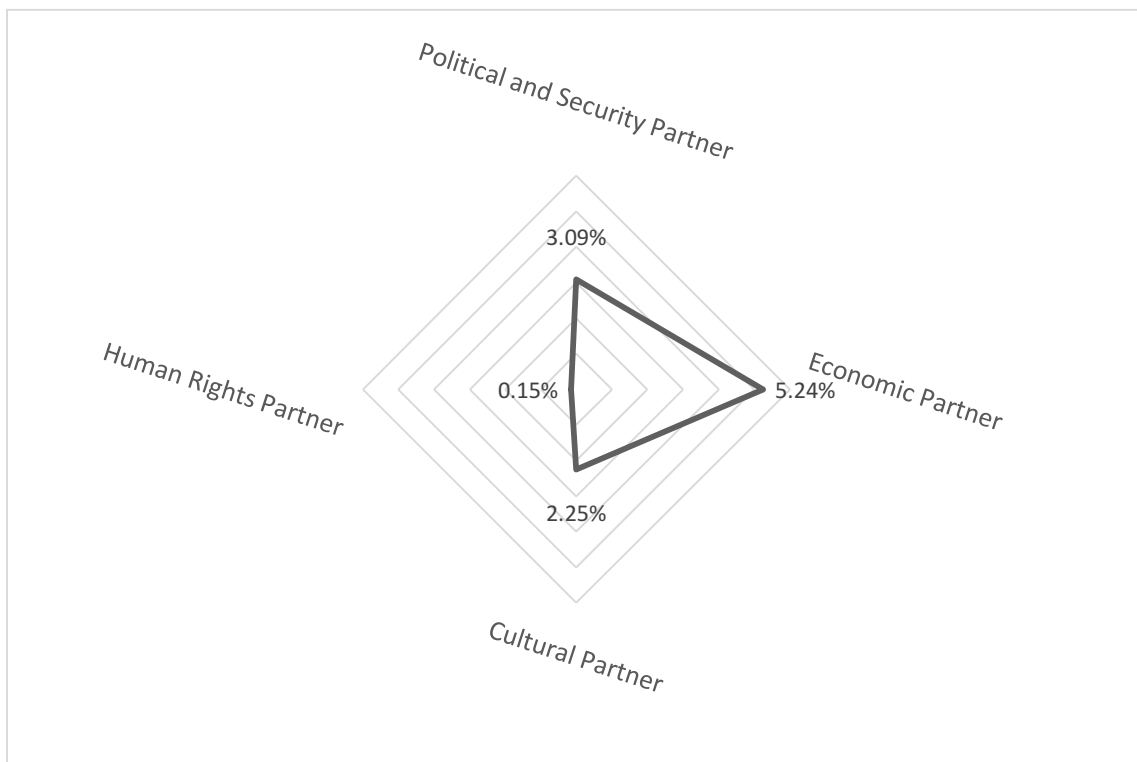


Figure 5.9. Frequency of four different types of partnerships in China's discourse in the context of the EU.

Economic partner

'Economic and trade relations are a major driving force behind the development of bilateral ties, and also the most dynamic and potential part of [the] China-EU

strategic partnership.’

—Former Chinese ambassador to the EU, Wu Hailong

(as cited in Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2013)

‘Together, China and EU member states account for 1/4th of the world’s population and 1/3rd of the global economy. Interaction of the two markets certainly generates considerable energy. China and Europe may be different in terms of the political system and guiding principle. But given Europe’s long tradition of commercial diplomacy, there are many areas where the two sides can have practical cooperation.’

—Prime Minister Li Keqiang (2015A)

An initial observation is that China’s statements about partnership are dominated by its economic and trade concerns. A large number of Chinese leaders’ speeches reflect their satisfaction with the close economic ties they enjoy with the EU and regard them as ballast for the whole partnership. In 2016, China was the EU’s second trade partner after the U.S., and the EU is China’s biggest trading partner (European Commission, 2016). The China-EU economic partnership has rapidly expanded into various new fields, and ‘both sides have established a China-EU climate change partnership, urbanization partnership, and strategic partnership on energy consumption (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2012A). This progress echoes the opinion of Wouters et al. (2012, p. 5): ‘From the Chinese point of view, the importance of Europe is not perceived in a consistent a way. Nevertheless, Europe has always been valued as a major

economic partner for bilateral trade, and a source of technology and investment’.

Economic complementarity is construed as an inherent advantage of being economic partners. As argued by China’s top diplomat Yang Jiechi (2011), ‘China and the EU vary in development stage and position in the global industrial chain. The two sides have different strengths in technology, capital, market, product and managerial expertise. There is a lot we can offer each other economically’. On the one hand, China continually reiterates the perennial significance of the EU to its economic development, praising the EU as ‘a key party that China can work with to achieve industrialization, urbanization, IT application and agricultural modernization as well as its “Two Centenary Goals”⁹³ (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2014A). On the other hand, it also continues reminding Europeans to discover China’s vast market and tremendous commercial opportunities. One example is Ambassador Song Zhe’s argument (2009D): ‘China-EU economic cooperation... will reduce living expenses by hundreds of Euros for every European family, reduce production costs for European enterprises, contribute to the curbing of inflation in the European countries, and create millions of job opportunities in Europe’.

Following the European debt crisis, China addressed this issue in a timely manner, ‘through the lens of their longstanding support for a stronger and more united EU that could work alongside Beijing to counter American hegemony’ (Casarini, 2012, p. 36), mainly by continuing to buy

⁹³ ‘Two Centenary Goals’ [两个一百年] is a set of goals proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping following the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2012. It includes 1) the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in 2021, at which point a moderately well off society would have been achieved; 2) the centenary of the founding of the PRC in 2049, at which point China will have become a ‘strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country’ (Xinhua News Agency, 2012B).

Eurozone bonds and increasing investments in industrial assets and infrastructure projects across Europe. Simultaneously, Beijing also lost no time in raising its international profile and portraying itself as a truly reliable partner to the European audiences. This manifested in Beijing's clear intent to 'use the financial assistance to Europe as a bargaining power' (Duggan, 2016, p. 45), at best getting some face like through the acceptance of its market economy status. At the 6th China-European Business Summit, October 2010, the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (2010) described China's efforts in these emotional words:

In the cold winter of January 2009, I visited Europe and brought with me not only the confidence needed to overcome the financial crisis, but also a procurement delegation to place orders to the European countries. *The EU is a strategic partner to China*, and China did not look on unconcerned when some Eurozone countries were in trouble. We continued to hold and buy Euro-denominated bonds and helped Iceland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy in their most difficult time. We will continue to render assistance and tide some countries over their difficulties. *China is a friend indeed* and I believe the entrepreneurs here all know it.

In addition, as an economic partner, China seldom mentions issues concerning multilateral economic governance. There is limited evidence to show that, at least at the discourse level, China and the EU are jointly endeavouring to shape the agenda of global economic issues.

It is completely reasonable to assume that when it comes to international relations, the concept of 'partnership' should be 'based on mutual interests' (Crossick, 2008, p. 264). No matter what

the meaning of the terms *partner* or *partnership*, they can certainly be used to describe China-EU economic and trade cooperation, given their size and prospects. Meanwhile, due to the predominance of such economic issues and interests, many other fields of policy are, to varying degrees, marginalised in the process of partnership construction.

Political and security partner.

International politics and security is a field in which Beijing relentlessly wishes to forge a united front with the EU and to achieve breakthroughs in some issues (e.g. the cancellation of the arms embargo).

On 31 March 2014, during an official visit to the EU headquarters in Brussels, President Xi Jinping first put forth the idea that China and the EU should establish a partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation. Later, on 2 April, China issued its second policy paper on the EU, which expatiated on these four kinds of partnerships. Among these four partnerships, peace and reform certainly belong to the political and security category.

‘China-EU partnership for peace: China stands ready to work with the EU to bring the two major forces closer to pursue peaceful development in a multi-polar world, respect and accommodate each other’s core interests and major concerns, make the international order and international system more just and equitable, advocate democracy in international relations and create a peaceful, stable, equitable and orderly development environment for all countries.’ (Chinese Foreign Ministry,

2014B)

'China-EU partnership for reform: China stands ready to work with the EU to better align China's comprehensive deepening of reform with the EU's reform and readjustment, draw upon each other's reform experience, share reform dividends, jointly improve the ability of reform and governance, and actively participate in the formulation and reform of the rules of global governance.' (Ibid.)

These words underscore how China and the EU bear the shared responsibility of promoting global peace and development and also have individual needs for internal reforms. However, such arguments are still steeped in abstract and vague objectives. For example, Beijing never proposes concrete methods for how to advocate democracy in international relations; nor does it make specific suggestions for practical cooperation with the EU.

In fact, in 2014's policy paper as well as in several speeches by Chinese leaders, China has listed various specific political and security issues and outlined what kind of partner it wishes to be:

Political Affairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Give full play to the role of <i>the China-EU Summit</i> in providing political guidance to China-EU relations● Step up <i>high-level exchanges and political dialogue</i> with EU institutions and member states.● Uphold the authority of <i>the UN</i> and support the UN in playing its leading role in world affairs.● Deepen exchange and cooperation in the framework of <i>the Asia-Europe Meeting</i>.● Enhance cooperation and exchange between <i>legislative bodies</i> and <i>political parties</i>.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Push for a peaceful resolution for regional hotspot issues such as <i>the Iranian nuclear issue, the Middle East peace process and the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.</i> ● Enhance dialogue about affairs in <i>Africa, Middle East and the Arctic.</i> ● Enhance China-EU cooperation on domestic affairs, including <i>human resources, social security, public administration, judicial reform, policy law enforcement etc.</i>
Security Affairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote cooperation in <i>escort missions</i> and safeguard peace in <i>the Gulf of Aden and waters off the Somali coast.</i> ● Promote cooperation in <i>peacekeeping operations in Africa.</i> ● Step up <i>counter-terrorism exchanges</i> and cooperation. ● Uphold the authority of <i>the multilateral disarmament regime</i> and strengthen <i>international nuclear security.</i> ● Strengthen <i>cyber-security</i> dialogue and cooperation. ● Step up personnel exchanges at various levels in <i>the military</i> between China and the EU.

Figure 5.10. China's proposals about political and security partners.

As indicated in Figure 5.10, there are three key features that can be summarised as follows:

Firstly, the impressive diversity of issues. There is clearly not only a sense of bilateral cooperation in the context of various global and domestic issues but also, remarkably, trilateral geopolitical cooperation in many areas, including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa etc.

All of these can be regarded as a stark reminder of the statement of Javier Solana (2014): 'The

EU and China are natural partners on key global issues'. Nguyen (2015, p. 58) argues that one basic conceptual difference is that China perceives strategic partnerships only as means for manipulating bilateral relations, while the EU believes that such a partnership should be predicated on cooperation in global governance. Anyhow, this study has shown that, at least in the realm of politics and security, China would like to promote global-level strategic coordination.

In addition, on many international and domestic affairs, China wittingly positions itself as a modest learner before the EU and shows strong interests in drawing on the EU's successful experience. Its concerns focus on issues directly related to people's livelihood, like urbanisation and social security. Not surprisingly, China is also mindful of excluding some issues like democracy or Chinese ethnic minorities from the political agenda. According to Chinese scholar Zhao Chen (2012), the EU's approach to global governance can be described as 'constitutionalism based on human rights', in contrast to China's approach of 'egalitarianism based on sovereignty'. As Mattlin observes (2012, p. 187), in EU-China relations, democracy has largely been a non-issue.

Second, Beijing concentrates on its role in the international regime with regard to political and security cooperation. That is to say, members of China's political elite seem to be faithful institutionalists, always overtly willing to cooperate with the EU and its member states through bilateral and multilateral regimes. As argued by Ambassador Song Zhe (2009A), 'dozens of dialogue mechanisms at different levels and through different channels have constituted an effective platform to deepen political mutual trust and enrich the strategic partnership'.

China always mentions multilateralism filtered through the UN. It especially attaches great importance to the sole authority of the United Nations (especially the United Nations Security Council) in legitimate collective actions concerning global security. This exposes the profound differences between China and the EU with regard to international intervention and R2P (Responsibility to protect). The European approach is 'more favorable to the international interference in each other's domestic affairs if necessary' (Song, 2010, p. 771). The Chinese approach is 'still sovereignty-centrism' (Ibid.) and sticks to 'the way provided in the past by the UN for anchoring any intervention in the consent of the five permanent Security Council members' (Attina, 2016, p. 185).

Last but not least, China shows serious concern for the areas geopolitically close to the EU e.g. the Middle East, Africa and the Arctic. Meanwhile, either in the 2014 policy paper or all the speeches cited in this study, it never mentions any political/security problems in the Asian-Pacific region, such as the South China Sea dispute or the North Korea nuclear issues. Seemingly, China has no intention of handling its proximal troubles with the EU, its partner, in whatever form. It can be speculated that, first, China may be unwilling to let the EU interfere in conflicts in East Asia, because a host of these problems are directly linked with China's proclaimed sovereignty or core interests.⁹⁴ Second, Chinese leaders may have no expectation of the EU's capability to help resolve Asian disputes as there is a 'lack of European strategic

⁹⁴ According to the whitepaper entitled *China's Peaceful Development 2011* (Information Office of the State Council of China, 2011), China's core interests include: 1) state sovereignty; 2) national security; 3) territorial integrity; 4) national reunification; 5) China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability; 6) basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development.

interest or presence of European military forces in Asia' (Shambaugh, 2005, p. 20). Briefly, one thing is indubitable: Beijing has strategic ambitions to expand its influence in Europe's neighbouring areas and also to achieve what President Xi (2014A) said at the 4th Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia: 'It is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia'.

Cultural partner.

China's discourse about being a cultural partner is relatively prominent. For China, the priority is to strengthen mutual understanding and consolidate public support for bilateral relations. China also shows a strong interest in including as many fields and topics as possible in the content of its cultural exchanges. At the Third meeting of the China-EU High-level People-to-people Dialogue Mechanism, State Councillor Liu Yandong mentioned seven key aspects of the China-EU cultural exchanges, including educational cooperation, technological cooperation, cultural communication, media cooperation, youth exchanges, women's issues and cooperation in tourism (as cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2015A).

Besides discussions about practical cooperation, another trend of this discourse is that Chinese leaders and diplomats continually stress the necessity of maintaining the diversity of civilisations, as if this value was not shared by the Europeans. Two such examples are cited below:

'China-EU partnership for civilization: China stands ready to work with the EU to

bring the two major civilizations in the East and West closer and set an example of different civilizations seeking harmony without uniformity, promoting diversity, learning from each other and enjoying common prosperity.’

—China’s Policy Paper on the EU

(Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2014A)

‘As cultural partners, China and the EU should push for boarder and deeper cultural exchanges as per the principles of equality and friendship. During the exchange process, China wishes that the EU side would understand a comprehensive, real and complex China from the objective, historical, and multi-dimensional perspectives.’

—China’s ambassador to the EU, Yang Yanyi (2014)

Obviously, China advocates a spirit of inclusiveness, namely, ‘recognizing all societies and cultures as coexisting and equal stakeholders in the global order’ (Ding, 2008, p. 197). It is a typical kind of cultural pluralism, namely, the universalism that China pursues is fully based on a recognition of national particularism. An undemonstrative effort for the decentralisation of the EU’s normative superiority can be observed in China’s discursive construction. For the Chinese, ‘Europe’ is not a universal concept (Wang, 2012, p. 4) or, in other words, ‘Europe’ is provincialised as an ordinary and regional part of the world civilisation. In this sense, it is quite understandable that President Xi Jinping (2014D) claims that ‘exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations must not be built on the exclusive praise or belittling of one particular

civilization’.

Meanwhile, these discourses also help fulfil an obscure political intention: they strive to subsume the differences of the political systems of both sides into a normal phenomenon of cultural heterogeneity; thus, there is no necessity to assess each side on the basis of a universalised standard. More bluntly, the value of diversity should be orientated towards political coexistence between China and the EU; the ‘harmony’ Beijing is most concerned about is the ‘continued Chinese Communist Party leadership’s “regime survival” within China’ (Scott, 2012, p. 56). For the EU, a strategic partnership should be built on the basis of ‘a mutual perspective on basic values’ (Nguyen, 2015, p. 58); however, China tries to persuade the EU to accept another kind of rule of ‘getting-along’, namely, ‘the “other” has a right to exist in the way in which it currently presents itself’ (Greenhill, 2008, p. 363). In this sense, as China’s cultural partner, it is recommended that the EU give China some basic thick recognition by admitting its existence (or, more accurately, its political regime) as a different but harmless ‘civilizational model’ and by treating China’s political or human rights situation with the principle of ‘seeking harmony but not uniformity’.⁹⁵

Human rights partner.

⁹⁵ ‘Seeking harmony but not uniformity’ [Chinese: 和而不同] from *The Analects of Confucius* is a frequently mentioned principle in China’s diplomatic discourse. According to Wang Jiarui (2015, p. 122), the former Director of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party, ‘the idea of “seeking harmony but not uniformity” is embodied in the support that China has voiced for the diversity of civilizations, and in its commitment to the coexistence, joint development, and common prosperity of different civilizations’.

A commitment to human rights and fundamental freedom is at the heart of the EU's global foreign policy, and the promotion of human rights always constitutes a core part of its engagement with China. The EU believes that bilateral cooperation in this sphere should be strengthened and should aim to achieve positive results in line with the development of a China-EU partnership (European Commission, 2006, p. 4). The EU also fully realises the Chinese authorities' hyper-sensitivity on this issue. As early as 1994, the EU's first policy paper to China had put forth the principle of 'quiet diplomacy': 'To make progress, all the EU institutions should pursue human rights issues through a combination of carefully timed public statements, formal private discussions and practical cooperation' (European Commission, 1994, p. 6). Facing the EU's work to resolve its human rights issues, China has been very good at giving low-key responses or reactions in a perfunctory manner.

This attitude is also epitomised in China's discourses about partnership with the EU. As seen in Figure 5.9, it is striking that the number of human rights-related discourses has stayed very low compared to others. Below is an example of one such prodigiously limited speech:

'We attach so much importance to principles of equality and mutual respect, on the basis of which we can conduct constructive dialogues [about human rights issues] with the EU and European countries.'

—Former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi

(as cited in Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2008)

'As per the principles of equal dialogue and seeking common ground while putting

aside differences, China will conduct in-depth dialogue on human rights issues with the EU, and strengthen the EU's knowledge and understanding about the Chinese view of human rights, achievements in the field of human rights, the strategy of rule by law in China, etc. Both sides should take a long-term and broad perspective to have open communication, enhance mutual trust, remove misgivings, increase positive factors and eliminate negative interference.'

—China's Ambassador to the EU, Yang Yanyi (2015)

'The EU side should attach equal importance to all forms of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, view China's human rights situation in an objective and fair manner, stop using individual cases to interfere in China's judicial sovereignty and internal affairs, and create a good atmosphere for human rights dialogue and cooperation between the two sides.'

—Chinese Foreign Ministry (2014A)

The above statements contain a clear message: the issue of human rights should be based on mutual and equal communication (or, in the Europeans' words, 'unconditional engagement'), not on one-sided information or begging for recognition. China remains on high alert regarding human rights issues, stereotypically believing that the EU and its member states never view its human rights 'in an objective and fair manner'. This also illustrates that the promotion and development of a partnership does not fundamentally alter the Chinese political elite's

perception of the EU in a political sense i.e. ‘the foreign hostile force’⁹⁶ that may threaten the CCP’s rule and suppress China’s rise. ‘The EU’s efforts to uphold human rights has even been (mis)read as evidence of a persistent Cold War and imperialist mentality seeking to subjugate China’ (Jørgensen & Wong, 2016, p. 59).

In the above discussion about the categorisation of partners, it can be seen again that China’s role performance as a partner is still mainly aimed at manifesting increasing closeness in the relationship and spreading its own epistemology for theorising its identity. Meanwhile, China’s endeavours to be recognised as partner’ also serve some mundane concrete ends. There are at least three clear goals: economic interests, regime security and strategic coordination with the EU at a global level. The most important value that China wishes to enact in its socialisation with the EU is that every state/international actor is entitled to pursue the model of governance and values it finds favourable. As such, the EU’s recognition of China is expected to be on the basis of shared interests and/or a sense of satisfaction with their relationship rather than a foundation of shared values or satisfaction with China’s inherent characteristics.

⁹⁶ ‘The foreign hostile force’ [Chinese: 境外敌对势力] or ‘the international anti-China force’ [Chinese: 国际反华势力] are China’s political terms used to describe any state, organisation or even person who challenges or criticises its political regime, ruling party or leaders. These terms frequently appear in China’s domestic political discourse.

5.3 The Weak, Developing Country and the Historical Victim

China's face is conventionally tightly linked with the rules or norms of its vertical or asymmetrical relationships. In seeking social recognition, Chinese people tend to present themselves as weak when interacting with those they perceive to be their superior. It is commonly believed that by downplaying one's personal strengths and achievements, others would view one more favourably, thus promoting interpersonal acceptance (Koh & Wang, 2012, p. 143). Specifically, a stereotypical manner of representation is to be proactive in exposing one's own limitations, even if they do not relate to one's reality (Lee, et al., 2014, p. 318). Correspondingly, this study posits that under the influence of face culture, China performs the role conception of the weak in its interactions with the EU, over-promoting international images of China as a developing country and a historical victim.

5.3.1 The distinctiveness of the weak

We can readily observe that in some international presentations, Chinese leaders intentionally downplay the positional change in China's role in the world system, while still accentuating its significant residual socio-economic problems and never tire of talking about how China was violated and isolated by the Western powers and Japan in the past. All of their arguments essentially aim at crafting two images—that of a developing country and a historical victim. Consistent with the assumption proposed by this thesis, the concrete hypothesis is that these two images are more remarkable in China's diplomatic discourse with the EU, its perceived

superior, than those with the ASEAN and AU, its perceived inferiors.

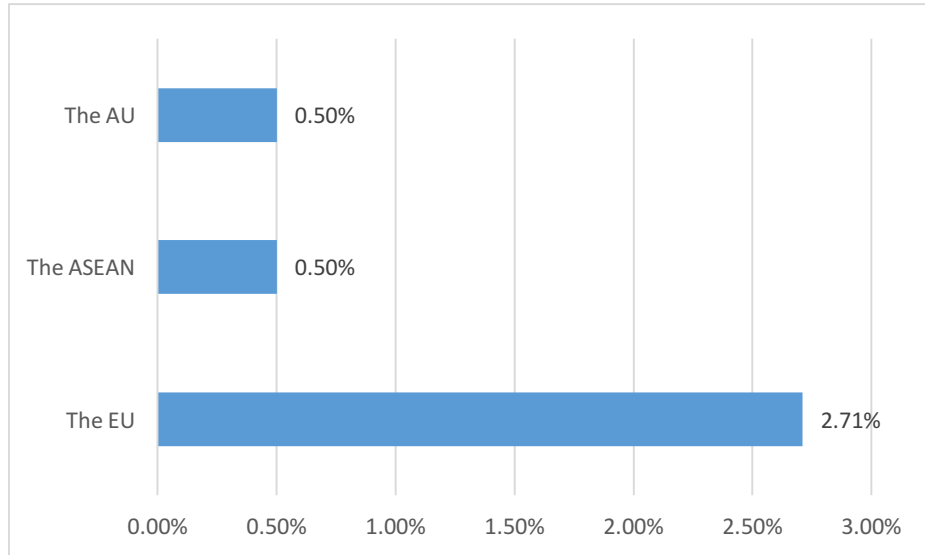


Figure 5.11.: Frequency of mentions of *weak* in China's discourse.

Coding all the arguments describing China as a developing country and a historical victim in the selected material through Nvivo yields the above data. All of the results coincide with the proposed assumption, namely, compared with the ASEAN and AU, China projects these two roles in its presentation to the EU to a much greater extent.

In general, when China emphatically describes its identity as 'weak' with the ASEAN and AU, the embodied political message is: All of us have endured the same kind of suffering in the past and are now at the same stage of domestic development, so the mutual support and understanding between us should be taken for granted. China manifests itself more as a counterpart of the ASEAN/AU rather than weak and certainly not as inferior. This trend can be

seen in the following statements:

‘Many current disputes in Asia are a relic of the past, and most Asian countries including China are victims. We should properly handle problems and seek peaceful solutions through direct dialogue and coordination, ensuring these disputes never plague us.’

—Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin (2014)

‘Both China and Africa were subjected to aggression and oppression by colonialism and imperialism in the past, and we both deeply value independence and equality. Neither of us has imposed our own will on others or interfered in each other’s internal affairs. We both stand for resolving problems arising from cooperation through equal consultation.’

—Prime Minister Li Keqiang (2014)

‘China continues to act like a small country with little impact on the global system at large and therefore little responsibility for it’ (Bergsten, 2008, pp. 64-64). In some cases, its discourses about being a developing country suggest that the ASEAN and the AU should not rely too much on China’s assistance, highlighting its still limited national power and awareness of avoiding dollar diplomacy:

‘On the other hand, China is a developing country. We must consider our own capacity when providing assistance to others... We hope to receive greater understanding and support from others for China’s policy and position.’

—Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun

(As cited in Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2012B)

Next, we will explore China's discourse around being weak with the EU, not only for its cultural characteristics but also its specific political meaning.

5.3.2 Developing country

There is no doubt that, by most standards, China is a developing country. What confuses observers is why China is so insistent on using this term when describing itself, given the extent of its power (Summers, 2014, p. 16). This section tries to illustrate that China adopts discursive strategies to reinforce its international recognition as weak with the EU.

First of all, most remarkably, the Chinese political elite would like to expose China's disadvantages, to garnish an image of a developing country through specific data or striking comparisons. They frequently refer to China's immense population pressure, uneven development between rural and urban areas and huge gap with the West in the spheres of science, technology, social welfare, education etc. In President Xi Jinping's speech (2014B) at the College of Europe, Bruges, one paragraph specially discusses China's identity as a 'developing country', which is clearly an emblematic reference:

China is the world's biggest developing country. China has made historic progress in development. It is now the second largest economy in the world. It has achieved

in several decades what took developed countries centuries to achieve. This is without doubt a proud achievement for a country whose population exceeds 1.3 billion. In the mean time, we are clearly aware that the large size of China's economy, when divided by 1.3 billion, will send China to around the 80th place in terms of per capita GDP. In China, over 74 million people rely on basic living allowances. Each year, more than 10 million urban people will join the job market. And several hundred million rural people need to be transferred to non-agricultural jobs, and settle down in urban areas. More than 85 million people are with disabilities. And more than 200 million people are still living under the poverty line set by the World Bank. And that is roughly the population of France, Germany and UK combined.'

Recently, China has even admitted to certain political disadvantages, despite such discourses never emerging in its official addresses to the domestic audience and the ASEAN and AU.⁹⁷ For example, in a speech at the Royal Society of Britain in 2011, former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao admitted, 'To be frank, corruption, unfair income distribution and other ills that harm people's rights and interests still exist in China. The best way to resolve these problems is to firmly advance the political structural reform and build socialist democracy under the rule of law'. Certainly, leaders attribute these unavoidable political problems to the fact that China is a developing country and certainly not due to the failures or mistakes of their ruling.

⁹⁷ More often, in official discourse with the ASEAN and AU, Beijing notes that it would like to 'exchange experience in the area of governing the country' [Chinese: 交换治国理政的经验], which shows its confidence and interest in promoting the so-called 'China model'.

Second, China often claims that its status as a developing country determines its peaceful rise in the global sphere. The underlying logic is that since China is a developing country that is and will be 'primarily preoccupied with solving its domestic problems' (Heberer, 2014, p. 101), it has no capability or motivation to challenge the existing world order. A platitude that frequently appears in China's discourse is, 'For China, the most populous developing country, to run its own affairs well is its most important contribution to world peace and development' (Yang, 2011). This repetitious discourse about China being a developing country is quite formulaic, but it is designed to shield China from the inveterate 'China Threat Theory', which aims to eliminate the negative image of China as a revisionist state or a troublemaker. Below are some conspicuous examples:

'Despite its success in its development, China remains the largest developing country. There is an arduous task ahead before the goals of modernization are reached. Consequently, China adheres to an independent foreign policy of peace, pursues the win-win strategy of opening-up and never seeks hegemony.'

—Former Chinese Premier Minister Wen Jiabao

(As cited in Xinhua News Agency, 2009)

'China's road to modernization is a long one. To govern such a big country with 1.3 billion people, it is essential to meet people's basic daily needs. The Chinese want better education, more stable jobs, better social security, a more comfortable living

environment and a richer cultural life... Addressing the day-to-day issues in governance in China requires persistent and enormous efforts on our part. That is why China's pursuit of peaceful development is not only a foreign policy goal, but more importantly, a compelling domestic imperative.'

—Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang (2013)

Third, based on its role conception as a developing country, Chinese leaders believe that the Europeans should show sympathy and give China more assistance and recognition. Beijing frequently suggests that Europeans should understand how difficult and arduous it is to govern such a complex country.⁹⁸ In face culture, self-effacement is always associated with and leads to implicit self-enhancement. Consequently, when China is enumerating its weaknesses, sometimes it also emphasises that the CCP's regime legitimacy is based on its substantial governmental achievements in dealing with these problems. Below is a typical demonstration of this:

More than 10 million people are still living below [the] poverty line, a population equal to that of Belgium. Each year, China needs to create more than 30 million new jobs, about the whole number of the UK's work force. Last week, when we

⁹⁸ In an interview in 2013, the former Chancellor of Germany, Helmut Schmidt, expressed surprise when he heard that 'the average Chinese person lives into his or her seventies' (according to a World Health Organization [WHO] report, life expectancy in China in 2013 was 76 years), as he originally believed that life expectancy in China was just 58 or 59 years (*South Review*, 2014). It can be seen that even for Schmidt who is viewed as an 'old friend of the Chinese people' and who has had close contact with and in-depth knowledge of China, there were still some misunderstandings and stereotypes—the ordinary European can thus be excused for holding similar beliefs about China.

commemorated the anniversary of the Sichuan earthquake, 15 million displaced people in the disaster area have been relocated. It's almost [like] giving every Dutch family a new home... The Chinese government and leaders should deploy and implement various policies prudently, carefully and steadily, pay attention to every step of their work, promote economic growth and safeguard social harmony. Their labor and toil cannot be easily imagined by an outsider.'

—Song Zhe (2009B)

When the Europeans want to discuss human rights or democracy with China, Chinese officials always have two shields to safeguard face: 1. We are still a developing country, and these issues are not a priority; 2. The Chinese government has made significant progress over the past several years in improving the well being of Chinese people. In the Chinese mind, the country's underdevelopment is a justifiable reason to discuss any unfavourable issue. Evidence of this can be seen in a speech by the former Ambassador, Song Zhe (2011B):

China started industrialization on the basis of [a] socialist system. Halfway into industrialization, China has begun to focus on and solving problems like distributive justice, social welfare, democratic decision-making, etc. Moreover, [the] Chinese population is more than twice the European population. Currently, we can be regarded generally successful, but the confronting problems are also unprecedented. When you Europeans observe China, please approach it more with a historical perspective, and respect the development path China chose for itself

and the on-going significant practices.

As such, the following interview of the then Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying with German Newspaper *Der Spiegel* explicates this point very well:

Der Spiegel: 'We Europeans certainly acknowledge China's progress in some fields like poverty alleviation, but what's not acceptable for us is your government abridges the citizens' freedom of speech and assembly and bans them from launching political parties.'

Fu Ying: 'When you criticize China for doing or not doing something, you are actually using your own standards to judge. Do you still remember your human rights situations when you were at the early stage of industrialization like China now is? Currently, you have created [a] high welfare state. Food and clothing are no long[er] a problem for you. However, we Chinese just got rid of the time of economic difficulty a short time ago, and people of my generation have experienced hunger. If you insist on using your own standards to judge China, if you always expect China to be a Western country, you will invariably be confused by such expectations.' (As cited in *Chinese Embassy to Germany*, 2010)

Fu Ying made no effort to persuade her audience to accept China's political and human rights situations. Fu's arguments always revolve around China's role as a developing country, which is still 'at the early stage of industrialization'. Such contextualisation sends the message: 'Since you Europeans have also experienced the same phase of development, you should have

empathy and should understand China's behaviours and values; since the Chinese have just emerged from a difficult period, you should be magnanimous in understanding China's differences and change your self-centred standards'. The moral appeals implied in the above discourse are in accordance with the emphasis of the rule of *renqing* in Chinese face culture (see more in Section 3.5.3).

5.3.3 Historical victim.

This study assumes that the role conception as weak leads to China's emphasis on its image as a historical victim. According to Chinese official arguments about modern history, during the period 1840-1949, China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal state, which was subject to constant aggression and enslavement by the Western powers and Japan. China's narratives about being a historical victim are primarily based on this collective memory of 'the century of national humiliation'.

For a long time, scholars in various fields have sensed that China's international identity is rooted in being a victim of historical aggression, which is not only on account of its sense of humiliation but also a calculated political manoeuvre. Lucian Pye (1968, pp. 71-72) noted in the 1960s that the Chinese political elite is very ardent in derailing 'the real and imagined way [in which] years ago [China was] grossly and cruelly mistreated by others'. Ho (2015, p. 8) believes that the century of humiliation has been a critical historical narrative that has framed the manner in which China relates with the world, especially the West. Wang Gungwu (2002, p.

vi) notes that the Chinese seem to love the past humiliation in the sense that ‘they know how to fight it and employ it in political struggle’. The contrastive analysis of this research also reveals that such a victim mentality seems to be more noticeable in China’s discourses with its perceived superiors. This section will explore how China represents itself as a historical victim with the EU.

First, a recurring theme around China being a historical victim is that since it was invaded and enslaved by Western imperialism, it is and will always be an innately righteous force promoting world peace and development, never seeking the violent and disastrous paths chosen by rising powers in Western history. China’s past humiliations have been transformed into its adherence to peaceful success and have become ‘an integral part of projecting its identity as a moral regime in world politics’ (Kim, 1994, p. 408). Below are some typical arguments:

‘China was once bullied by foreign powers and therefore knows dearly the humiliation of inequality. China will never bring such agony to others. Nor will it pursue its own development at the expense of others’ interests. China’s cooperation effort benefits both China and its partners and facilitates both sides’ social and economic development.’

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe (2009B)

‘Even when China indeed becomes strong and developed, it will not bully the weak. This is because we Chinese suffered so much from wars and chaos in modern history that we do not want to see such history repeat itself to others. “Do not do

unto others what you do not want others to do unto you.” This ancient teaching is a core Chinese value and an abiding belief for us.’

—Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang (2013)

Second, the discourse around being a historical victim illustrates that China, which has naturally had a historical trajectory different from Europe’s, has adopted an idiosyncratic path in its politics and development. In this sense, ‘historical victim’ becomes China’s standard rhetoric to rationalise its peculiarities and demands. In the context of domestic politics, Beijing wishes for the Europeans to understand the historical inevitability of establishing a socialist regime in China. As argued by an article in *Qiushi*,⁹⁹ the so-called ‘Chinese path’ [Chinese: 中国道路] means that ‘after experiencing a different course of history, we surely oppose to tailoring Chinese reality to Western logic and mechanically applying Western experiences to evaluate China’ (Chen, 2015, p. 66).

Regarding foreign affairs, the role of the historical victim is often used to support China’s sensitivity to state sovereignty. The logic is that as China has been a victim of colonialism, maintaining its status as an equal sovereign state has become a paramount aim and a mother principle that guides its foreign policy (Chen, 2016, p. 783; Pan, 2012, p. 22). One typical manifestation of this is China’s explanation for its inflexible non-interference policy. According to the following speech by President Xi (2014B), it can be seen that such a policy is justified as an inevitable choice based on historical experience:

⁹⁹ *Qiushi* [English: seeking truth] is the official magazine of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

As a result of incessant foreign invasions, China experienced great social turmoil, and its people had to live a life of extreme detestation. Poverty prompted a call for change, and people experiencing turmoil are inspired by stability. After a hundred years of persistent and unyielding struggle, the Chinese people, sacrificing losses of tens of millions of lives, ultimately took their destiny back into their own hands. Nevertheless, *the memory of foreign invasion and bullying has never been erased from the minds of the Chinese people.*

And that explains why we cherish so dear the life we live today. The Chinese people want peace; we do not want war. This is the reason why China follows an independent foreign policy of peace. *China is committed to non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. And China will not allow others to interfere in its own affairs.* This is the position that we have upheld in the past. It is what we will continue to uphold in the future.

In some of its discourse, the West is unequivocally blamed for China's past and current weaknesses, and the unspoken message is that Europeans are not qualified to instruct or accuse China. Such behaviour is more 'tit-for-tat' and also, according to me, converts 'China's problems' into 'Europe's mistakes'. In the afore-mentioned interview (as cited in *Chinese Embassy to Germany*, 2010), Fu Ying demonstrates this idea:

Der Spiegel: 'Regarding human rights standards, you seem to like to compare China with Europe in the early 19th century.'

Fu Ying: 'Chinese scholars in the late Qing Dynasty had wished to learn the Western ideas of human rights and tried to reform China's feudal system, but they quickly

found that the Westerners at that time had a limited understanding of human rights and no interest in sharing human rights with Chinese people. In the Concession era, foreigners were above the Chinese and human rights were exclusive to them. Consequently, China's first human rights wave had no success. The second wave included the workers' and students' movements, supported by the Chinese Communist Party. However, the PRC had been blocked by the West since its establishment. That means that many Western ideas, including human rights, were rejected at that time.'

Third, in recent years, China has especially emphasised its role as a victim of Japanese invasion during World War II in order to seek support from the Europeans. Since 2009, due to the territorial disputes and historical problems between China and Japan, Sino-Japan relations have deteriorated steadily and both sides are involved in a media war. As the EU has no alliance with Japan as well as no conflict of fundamental interest with China, Beijing wishes for the EU to be on its side, on the basis of their common understanding of World War II and China's past suffering. To a large degree, China regards the Europe as 'the third party for balancing China-Japan relations' (Huang, 2016, p. 54), which is expected to contribute to China's 'hedging strategy against the always-fluctuating Sino-Japanese and Sino-US relations' (Thies, 2012, p. 15). Below are some characteristically strong statements:

'History is the best teacher. It faithfully records the journey that every country has gone through and offers guidance for its future development. In the over 100 years since the Opium War in 1840 prior to the founding of the People's Republic of

China in 1949, China was ravaged by wars, turmoil and foreign aggression. To the average Chinese, it was a period of ordeal too bitter to recall. The war of aggression against China committed by Japanese militarism alone resulted in over 35 million Chinese military and civilian casualties. These atrocities are still fresh in our memory.'

—Xi Jinping (2014C)

'Both China and Europe experienced the suffering of World War II. Both Chinese and European people were the victims of war. No one knows hard-won peace better than us, and no one cherishes today's peaceful environment more than us... In Japan, some politicians still perversely visit Yasukuni shrine which honors war criminals in World War II, openly deny war crimes, attempt to falsify history, challenge the post-war order, and undermine regional peace and stability. These actions should raise an alarm for all the peace-loving countries and people. Safeguarding the victory of World War II and the post-war international order is still Asia's reality and also should be the common task of the entire international society.'

—Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao (2014)

For some observers, China carries the heavy burden of aggrievement. Kalvalski (2013, p. 257) believes that contemporary Chinese diplomacy can be considered an attempt to rectify its past national humiliation by projecting an international identity aimed to dispel the spectre of the

past. This argument is not entirely correct as, through this study, it can be seen that the Chinese authorities in fact deliberately maintain their identity of being historical victims. In fact, there is no real unpleasantness or spirit of revenge in China's official discourse; the affective burden of historical humiliation has become a hermeneutic device for China to seek international recognition, including those about its peaceful development, special political regime and even its position in international conflicts. This also illustrates that, for China, wanting to be seen as weak and struggling for recognition by major powers can coexist at the same time.

5.3.4 Praising the EU.

In Chinese facework, self-effacement and other-enhancement always appear simultaneously (see more in Section 3.5.4). It is emphatically cultural in the sense that when China relentlessly highlights its weaknesses, it often lavishes praise on the EU at the same time. According to Chinese cultural logic, compliments to the EU, even those that are not completely in line with reality or China's true feelings, are very necessary to show China's modesty and friendliness in order to gain recognition from the EU.

The most common manifestation is to accord great recognition to the international status of the EU. A generally recognised fact is that 'the EU still remains a partial and inconsistent international actor even though the Lisbon Treaty had marked a new era in its diplomacy' (Toje, 2008, p. 122). Furthermore, in practice, 'China prefers to deal with national capitals rather than the EU as a whole, provoking and encouraging political divisions in Europe and

openly pursuing a divide-and-rule strategy. In many ways, China reveals the limitations of the EU as a strategic actor in world politics' (Maher, 2016, p. 976).

However, in China's euphoric discourse, the EU is depicted as a complete and capable power, and there is never any hint at questioning its ability or prospects. Even the Europeans have sensed this: 'For some years, China has appeared to believe more strongly in Europe's role as a serious player on the world stage than we do ourselves' (Zhang, 2016, p. 475). Below are some of the typical arguments of Chinese officials regarding the EU:

'The Europe has led the trends of economic development and social reform since a long time, occupying an important position in the history of mankind. No matter how time changes, the EU can always take timely actions to adapt to changing situations and play a leading role.'

—Former Vice Foreign Minister Fuying

(as cited in *Chinese Embassy to Germany*, 2010)

'China always conceives of the EU as an important and positive force in the international arena, playing a decisive role in maintaining world peace, promoting common development, dealing with global challenges, solving regional conflicts and hot-spot issues, building a fair and rational new international political and economic order.'

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe (2011)

'[The] European Parliament plays a significant role in the EU's foreign relations. China always attaches great importance to cooperation and exchange with the European Parliament, and believes that it is a significant stakeholder in the development of China-EU relations.'

—Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang

(as cited in *Xinhua News Agency*, 2015)

As Chinese scholar Wang Yiwei (2012, p. 8) notes, 'China is probably the most supportive "great power" to European integration.' Even against the background of the European debt crisis, the Chinese political elite still expressed its unwavering confidence in the EU's ability to resolve the crisis:

'In the past sixty-plus years, the Europe integration process has, as a whole, moved ahead... Although the Europe integration and the EU organizations often provoke criticism, we still have reasons to believe that the EU can overcome difficulties and continue to develop.'

—China's ambassador to the EU, Yang Yanyi

(As cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2015)

'Europe's many advantages have not been erased by the sovereign debt crisis. On the contrary, in the course of combating the crisis, the European integration process has shown vitality, which gives people confidence that Europe will emerge

from the temporary difficulties stronger than before. China supports the EU's efforts to counter the crisis and further the integration process. We are convinced that European countries will find a solution to the problems and overcome the challenges that they face.'

—Former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (2011)

Recent speeches by President Xi Jinping always elaborate how this powerful man was influenced by European civilisation. His message to Western audiences is that just as European cultural achievements have always deeply attracted and influenced him, they will also similarly have an instructive impact on China. This is also a way of giving face—active other-enhancement. Let's have a closer look at how many books President Xi has read and how well he really knows Europe:

'To be, or not to be, that is the question.' This line from Hamlet has left a lasting impression on me. When I was barely 16 years old, I left Beijing for a small village in northern Shaanxi Province to be a farmer and spent seven years of my youth there. Back in those days, I tried every means to lay my hands on William Shakespeare's works, reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. I was captivated by their dramatic plots, vivid characters and emotional intensity. Standing on the barren loessland of Shaanxi as a young man, I often pondered the question, to be or not to be. Eventually I made up my mind that I shall

dedicate myself to serving my country and my people. I am sure that Shakespeare not only appeals to readers with his literary talents, but also inspires people's lives in profound ways.

—President Xi Jinping (2015B), at a dinner hosted by The Lord Mayor of the City of
London

I developed a keen interest in French culture and particularly French history, philosophy, literature and art when I was a young man. By reading modern French history, especially writings on the French Revolution, I have gained a better perspective of the laws governing the political and social evolution of the human society. By reading Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Saint-Simon, Fourier and Sartre, I have deepened my understanding of how progress of the mind propels progress in society. By reading Montaigne, La Fontaine, Molière, Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, George Sand, Flaubert, Alexandre Dumas, Fils, Maupassant and Romain Rolland, I have better appreciated life with all its joys and sorrows. I still recall vividly literary characters such as Jean Valjean, Quasimodo and Boule de Suif. By watching the works of Millet, Manet, Degas, Cézanne, Monet and Rodin and the paintings of Zao Wou-ki, which integrate elements of both East and West, I have refined my artistic taste. And by reading science fiction written by Jules Verne, I have discovered a new world where imagination knows no boundary.

—President Xi Jinping (2014D), At the Meeting Commemorating the 50th

Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations

Germany not only world-famous for its advanced science and technology and modern manufacturing, but also for its philosophy, literature, music and other areas of the birth of many world-renowned giants, many of their works have long been known to the Chinese people. These works—Goethe, Schiller, Heine et al.'s literary masterpiece and immortal poem, there is Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Heidegger, Marcuse and others' philosophical debates, there are Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms and others' beautiful melodies. Including myself, a lot of Chinese readers have gained pleasure from their work; to feel the power of ideas, deepen the understanding of the world and life.

—President Xi Jinping (2014C), In a speech at Germany's Colbert Foundation

5.4 The Counterpart

In a seminar on the China-EU partnership organised by Egmont in 2011, the then Asia director of the EU's External Action Service, James Moran (2011, p. 2), said, 'It is true that Europe and China may disagree and have different views on some issues. Good friendships are based on *openness and honesty*'. However, good friendships for the Chinese are based more on restrained openness and behind-the-scenes honesty.

As revealed in Chapter 3, in Chinese social life, any public disclosure of differences or open criticism can threaten the harmony of interpersonal relationships; meanwhile, any point of

commonality (even something verisimilar) can be regarded as the basis of fostering recognition. The third assumption of this study is that following the role conception of a counterpart, China is intent to depict itself as a homogeneous international actor much like the EU. This assumption seems to challenge the opinion of many theorists: national identity, by nature, is intrinsically oriented towards reproducing and magnifying differences between itself and the other (Hopf, 2002; Shih, 2012, p. 71). It also somewhat problematises the idea that 'the Chinese leadership has always tried to enhance China's international standing while maintaining a distinctive international identity separate from that of the West' (Deng, 2008, pp. 66-67). This section will illustrate how China presents itself as the EU's counterpart to gain recognition.

5.4.1 Distinctiveness of a counterpart.

This study places discourse on China's role conception as a counterpart into three categories: the same systematic characteristics, the same power status and the same values. After coding all the related discourses from my research material, we can conclude that the assumption based on face culture is true, namely, when facing the EU—the perceived superior—China is more inclined to present their common features; however, when facing the ASEAN and AU, China does not show this behavioural trend.

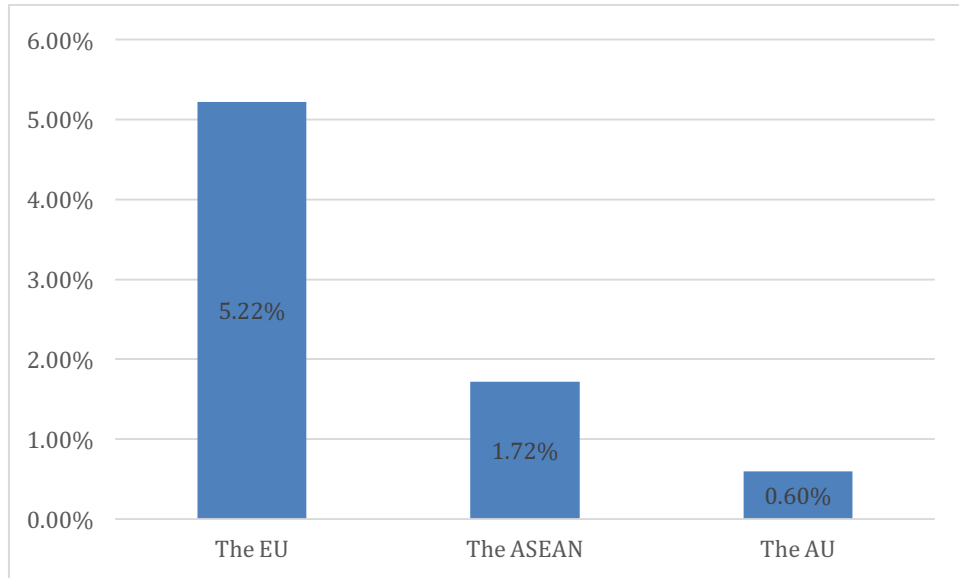


Figure 5.12. Frequency of mentions of *counterpart* in China's diplomatic discourse.

The differences seen in Figure 5.12 are consistently in the direction assumed, and all of them are statistically remarkable. Before the ASEAN or AU, China mentions similarities merely in a few ambiguous words: at the systematic level, both are facing the world full of opportunities and challenges; at the actor level, China highlights its identity as a developing country and emphasises that 'both sides consider improving the economy and people's livelihoods as the most crucial and pressing tasks' (Li, 2015B); on diplomatic values, Beijing confidently believes that China, the ASEAN and AU share many opinions on international affairs, especially the values of treating everyone equally, non-interference in internal affairs, promoting a new international political and economic order etc.

However, when China faces the EU, it clarifies the similarities between them much more vividly. A substratal logic of such discourse is that these similarities can make China and the EU feel

naturally close to each other. Certainly, one point we should be careful of is that some of the similarities China mentions are not de facto but are unilaterally perceived or deliberately constructed. The following sections will analyse China's discursive construction of the role of counterpart.

5.4.2 The same systematic characteristics.

In speeches, Chinese leaders often dwell lengthily on how both the sides are together in the same international environment, facing consistently congruent opportunities and challenges and hence should behave in the same or similar ways. More often, China presents its own judgment of the world as axiomatic fact or consensus. The following excerpt is from a speech by former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (2011) presented at the Danish Institute for International Studies:

The balance of power in the world is moving towards more equilibrium. This is a boost to multilateralism and greater democracy in international relations, and will have positive, far-reaching impact on the evolution of the international order. With growing interdependence, countries across the globe hope to see peace, development and cooperation and appreciate the importance of standing together in times of adversity and pursuing mutual benefit. They are working hard to adjust their economic structures, shift their models of growth and reform the international economic and financial system. Indeed, change represents the trend

of our time and the aspiration of the people.

Yang's speech presents a world full of vitality and hope, the decentralisation of power and echoes of people's aspirations. His speech indicates a series of positive systematic changes that coincide with both sides' strategic goals and can contribute to the growth of their bilateral relations. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi says (as cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2014B), 'Against a background of world-multi-polarization, economic globalization, cultural diversification and democratization of international relations, China-EU cooperation has been more global, strategic and exemplary, which can play a greater role in pushing the balance of international power and promoting world peace and development'.

For a long time, China has persistently called for the reform and reordering of the prevailing unequal international system (Yilmaz, 2015, pp. 1-14). Correspondingly, the EU and European states are viewed as vested interest groups of this unfair global system. However, only with the EU, China seems to temporarily hide the emancipatory features of its diplomacy, tending to emphasise their common future prospects.

Certainly, China also mentions their shared challenges from a global and macroscopic perspective, suggesting that both sides should acknowledge each other's strategic significance and cope with challenges together. In an essay, Ambassador Yang Yanyi writes (2014):

Uncertainties and destabilizing factors affecting the global and regional environment are increasing. Hotspot issues emerge from time to time. The world is moving towards multi-polarity amidst twists and turns. The global recovery has

been a slow and difficult process and growth remains lackluster. Many global problems, such as environmental pollution and climate change, pose a serious challenge to human survival and development. These new changes require both China and the EU to perceive each other from a new strategic perspective, to enrich the connotation of a China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership.

For the past few years, on various occasions, Beijing has frequently mentioned that ‘China and the EU are amongst those who built and maintained the post-World War II world’ (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2015). Obviously, such attempts to reinforce this common systematic characteristic is aimed at reminding the Europeans to side with China in the Sino-Japan conflict on the disputed islands as well as their other historical conflicts.

5.4.3 The same power status

At the individual level, the prevailing discourse tries to testify that China and the EU share the same power status in the international sphere. For a long time, China has viewed the EU as a complete pole in the post-Cold War world, much like itself. China’s former EU ambassador Song Zhe (as cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2008) said:

As two rising powers in the world, China and the EU must play an increasingly influential role in international affairs. We could say that no global problem can be solved without the cooperation and participation of China and the EU.

In recent years, the term ‘Two Powers, Markets and Civilizations’ has been used as shorthand

to refer to the common power status of China and the EU. On 20 November 2013, President Xi Jinping (as cited in *Xinhua News Agency*, 2013) proposed this new strategic positioning during his meeting with former EU leaders Herman Van Rompuy and Jose Barroso:

As the largest developing country and the largest group of developed countries, China and the EU are 'two powers' for upholding world peace; as two major economies in the world, China and the EU are 'two markets' that promote common development; as two great birthplaces of Eastern and Western cultures, China and the EU are 'two civilizations' that promote human progress.

China's strategic purpose has been very explicit: a China-EU partnership should involve a recognition of each other's status as a pole in the newly multipolar order.

According to the traditional realist viewpoint, 'status is a positional good, meaning that one group's status can improve only if another's declines' (Swaine & Tellis, 2000, pp. 98-99). On the contrary, China demonstrates a kind of social creative strategy as Mummendey and Schreiber (1984, pp. 363-368) argue i.e. two social groups may be able to attain a positive status at the same time as long as a lot of emphasis is placed on multiple criteria and the possibility of coexistence.

5.4.4 The same values

It is not surprising that China often refers to the fact that it shares the same international environment and status as the EU. This proves that 'for better or worse, relative power

sensitivities and concrete material interests still dominate EU-China relations' (Mattlin, 2012, p. 182). Meanwhile, the author believes that the most embodying feature of the role conception of 'counterpart' is the habitual assurance that China's political values are congruent with the EU's.

In fact, almost all scholars agree that China and the EU are two distinct international actors, especially in terms of values and ideologies. 'The EU and China offer some of the most conspicuous indications of the different types of normative power in global life' (Kavalsiki, 2013, p. 249). Pan Zhongqi (2013, p. 1) points out that 'even though China and the EU often use the same political concepts in their respective political discourses, it is no doubt that they still have little in common in [terms of] political values'. For example, whereas the Chinese and Europeans may agree on democracy and human rights as necessary political goals, their understanding of these concepts still differ substantially. However, in the Chinese leaders' and diplomats' discourse, the illusion that China and the EU are in fact an ideological alliance is created purposefully and vividly.

Multipolarity

In China's eyes, both sides regard multipolarity as a legitimate goal in the current and future world order. After the Cold War, both Europeans and the Chinese focused on the emerging process of multipolarisation, but this does not mean that multipolarity automatically becomes a shared strategic pursuit for these two sides. The Chinese view multipolarity as the 'result of a

shift in global power' (Renard, 2011, p. 24)—a world that is more likely to be dominated by cooperation than competition. An ideal international order 'would be a multi-polar world, in which it is one pole among others, rather than a world order dominated by the U.S.' (Zhang, 2016, p. 469).

Inside the EU, there are always conflicting opinions about this. For example, French leaders are often keen to advocate a multipolar world, while some other European leaders are reluctant to embrace it (Scott, 2013, p. 232). Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2003) openly expressed his worries about a possibly multipolar world: 'There is no more dangerous theory in international politics than that we need to balance the power of America with other competitive powers; different poles around which nations gather'. At the EU level, although multi-polarity is a term frequently appearing in diplomatic language, it serves more as a neutrally descriptive word rather than a fully identified objective. Jose Barroso (2010, pp. 7-8) made the following balanced comment on multipolarity, which reflects the Europeans' ambivalent ideas: 'There are, clearly, some virtues in a multipolar international society. It limits "hegemonic power", which can often be a source of instability... However, it would be unwise to overlook the risks associated with multipolarity. A quick glance at European history also provides ample evidence of the dangers of an understanding of multipolar strategies in terms of expansion and competition for predominance'.

In fact, Chinese officials must have realised that there are various or ambiguous opinions about multipolarity in the EU;¹⁰⁰ however, China's individual preference is still exhibited and

¹⁰⁰ There have been a number of academic articles and news reports in China about the considerably divergent views on multi-

reinforced as a shared goal for both sides. In 2009, Li Ke Qiang (2009) claimed clearly that 'China and the EU are the leading promoters of multipolarity'. Below is another representative argument from the Deputy Foreign Minister Song Tao (2014):

Promoting multipolarity is the strategic foundation of China-EU relations. China and the EU are two major powers in [the] global order. Both sides have no conflict of fundamental interest, support multipolarity and oppose unilateralism... Due to the common values of multipolarity and multilateralism, China and the EU can conduct mutually beneficial cooperation on the road to their respective development, demonstrating that the bilateral relation is really strategic, stable and comprehensive.

It has been a commonly held view that 'Beijing now identifies with Europe as fellow travelers on the road to [the] containment of American power... a multi-polar world with Beijing and Brussels looking to check American power' (Watts, 2006; see also, Womack, 2008, p. 6; Cameron, 2009, p. 30; Huang, 2016, p. 47). If only literally, this conclusion is correct. However, the author believes that Beijing is not that naïve and does not view the EU (and its member states) from such an idealistic perspective. China's first motive to claim the EU as its partner to 'support multipolarity and oppose unilateralism' is to highlight their possible shared values and to gain a mutual recognition of their status as multipolar powers.

polarity within the EU (e.g. Chen, 2010, pp. 1-16; Ren & Xu, 2015, pp. 6-7).

Multilateralism

China confirmedly emphasises that both sides have a natural convergence of principles when dealing with international affairs and conflicts. Wen Jiabao (as cited in *Xinhua News Agency*, 2012A) has summarised some of these points as follows:

Both China and the EU are committed to multilateralism, greater democracy in international relations and world peace and stability. We both follow free and open economic and trade policies, reject trade protectionism and work to advance economic globalization. We both advocate [the] protection of diverse civilizations and inter-civilization dialogue and exchanges.

'Multilateralism' is the most mentioned foreign policy value in China's and the EU's foreign policy discourse. As an idea recipient, China is continuing to penetrate and demystify this EU-dominated concept. Alder and Crawford (2004, p. 8) argue that the values placed on multilateralism by the EU create a different paradigm for the balance of power (multipolarity) framework; however, for China, the disposition of multilateralism markedly serves to establish a multipolarity framework. In addition, with regard to concrete practices, the EU always attaches importance to the authoritative role of international law and institutions, while China tends to focus on maintaining the dominant position of sovereignty and the autonomy of state behaviour.¹⁰¹ Ample evidence shows that there is no indication of such divergences in China's diplomatic discourse. Multilateralism seems like a self-evident strategic convergence existing

¹⁰¹ In recent years, China has started to adopt a less rigid line on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in its external relations (Helimann & Schmidt, 2014).

on both sides' interactions, without the necessity to explore its specific meanings and implications. On some occasions, China even clearly expresses its support for the EU's ideas about multilateralism:

The EU advocates 'effective multilateralism', stands for a primary role of the United Nations in global governance, and believes that the G20 regime is an important platform for countries to strengthen policy coordination. These are all consistent with China's positions.

—Yang Yanyi (2014)

Obviously, China never accepts all the ideas of effective multilateralism proposed by the EU.¹⁰² However, in its diplomatic discourse, Beijing ignores the existing differences and displays an ambiguous preference. It is often assumed in a lot of European literature that the EU's efforts to promote effective multilateralism will socialise China into accepting its norms and values (Scott, 2013, p. 238). From China's practices, we can see that it is at least very adept at borrowing the European language or words to package itself, conceal its differences and highlight its role conception as a counterpart.

¹⁰² Europeans generally advocate 'effective multilateralism' in reference to rule-based multilateralism, whereas the Chinese tend to interpret this term as 'multilateralism that works' (Renard, 2011, p. 25). In addition, Chinese officials do not use the term effective multilateralism in formal documents, and many Chinese scholars believe that the effectiveness that the EU pursues is more/just for its own favourable position or normative hegemony in the current global governance (Cui, 2007, p. 60; Yang, 2012; Zhang, 2012, pp. 29-30).

Democracy and human rights.

If only from the Western perspective, 'the rising China is not enjoying the full membership of the international society, or it does not qualify for rightful membership because it is surely far from being recognized as a human rights norms abider or democratic country' (Zhang, 2011, p. 243). However, in its official discourse, China also underlines that both sides are like-minded actors in their dealings with domestic politics, exhibiting the possibility that it may follow the Western model.

To the Europeans, the Chinese political elite struggles to demonstrate that they are not aliens. In October 2015, in the UK Parliament, President Xi (2015) talked about his idea about the rule of law:

Being here, in this old parliament building, gives one the feeling of going back in time. Britain was the first country to establish the system of representative government. The British Parliament, which came into being in the 13th century, is the oldest parliament in the world. In China, the concept of putting people first and following the rule of law emerged about 4,000 years ago, during the reign of Yu, The Great. In the Xia Dynasty, there was already a saying that the people are the foundation of a country, and only with a stable foundation can a country enjoy peace... Today, as Chinese people are advancing the rule of law in an all-round way, they draw inspiration from not only China's own legal traditions, but also the best practices of the rule of law of other countries.

In September 2012, the former Chinese EU ambassador Wu Hailong (2012) claimed that China and the Europe share common views about safeguarding citizens' human rights:

Despite the differences in many aspects, there is one thing in common between China and Europe—both sides value the importance of smooth communication between the government and the people, and both sides regard the need to fully protect the rights and interests of the people to express and appeal in policy making as a must of modern democracy and an integral part of the efforts to protect and promote human rights.

Here, Ambassador Wu is trying to persuade his European readers to recognise China as the same kind of democratic and modern state as the European ones. From the liberal perspective alone, there seems to be no difference between how China and the EU understand democracy and human rights.

Similarly, in 2009, Wen Jiabao (as cited in *Financial Times website*, 2009) introduced China's political reforms in an interview with the *Financial Times*: 'In the eyes of the West, it seems that the Chinese are afraid of democracy or elections. Actually, this is not true... Now we have direct elections at the village level and also direct elections of People's Deputies at the township level'. In front of Westerners, it can be seen that Wen tactfully used the term 'election'—the word that best represents the spirit of democracy—to prove that competitive democracy as a value is also applicable in China.

The cultural research presented in Chapter 3 has revealed that Chinese conformity is often

nothing more than surface conformity, that is, compliance without internalisation. As such, many cited arguments are instrumental and paradoxical, displaying an ostensible obedience to the normative demands of the EU. The model of the nation-state represented by the EU provides a clue to China about how to incorporate heterogeneous factors into its discourse and present itself as a 'normal' state.

5.4.5 Obscuring differences

On account of face culture, Chinese people tend to hide their true personalities and not highlight individual differences. As such, following the culturally prescribed role conception of counterpart, it can be seen that China not only casts itself as a similar international actor as the EU but also endeavours to overcome binary thinking and obscure the inevitable differences between them.

First of all, in open diplomatic discourse, China always glosses over differences using some conventional phrases. An example of some typically used words is as follows: 'China and the EU differ in social system, cultural background and development stage. We face different problems and difficulties. It is natural that we hold different views on some issues' Wen Jiabao (2012).

These kinds of statements can be found in most official discourse material addressed to the EU. More often, China would like to admit that it holds different views on some issues, but it does not specify which issues those are. The core idea is that as the existence of differences is a normal phenomenon engendered from some intrinsic factors (i.e. the above-mentioned 'social

system, cultural background, and development stage'), and there is no necessity of pursuing uniformity or following the other side.

Generally, China avoids discussing differences openly. In an interview, the former State Councillor Dai Bingguo describes China's diplomatic style as follows: 'To defend your principles does not have to be intimidating or unfriendly. I would like to say serious words in a low voice' (*The Beijing News*, 2016). This is a typical pattern of Chinese facework, which aims to not offend the face of the other side even in conflict situations.¹⁰³

Second, China attributes most differences to communication problems between China and the EU. It is believed that many such 'differences' are a result of the lack of bilateral communication, which further leads to the Europeans' prejudice and misunderstanding about China. In this sense, the incommensurable conflicts of values are interpreted as solvable technical matters. Logically, one effective way of eliminating differences is to strengthen various forms of exchange so that the EU and Europeans can adjust their presumptuous perspectives. Below are some typical examples:

'The EU still has sizeable prejudices and doubts about China, and often interferes in

¹⁰³ Some of the respondents in this study also made similar comments: 'Too many policy documents or leaders' speeches seem to be devoid of substance. We are still shy to put interest or conflict on the table and to discuss them straightforwardly' (Interview 2).

'When dissatisfied with some country, China normally refrains from a full expression of its real ideas, at least avoiding criticising someone by name. Although everyone knows the object of China's dissatisfaction, from the Chinese perspective, careful speech can leave some leeway for the situation to possibly change' (Interview 9).

China's internal affairs.'

—Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao (2014)

'I am happy to notice that Europeans who have visited China are the most likely to like China, to have a relatively balanced and fair view towards China's things. That's because they have witnessed China's development, realized the complexity and diversity of China's problems. They can understand the necessity of China's rise, rationality of China's own development path, and importance of promoting China-EU cooperation.'

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe (2009C)

'The EU should be with the times, envisage the profound changes of [the] international order, adapt the world multipolarity, economic globalization, and diversified development models with a positive state of mind.'

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe

(as cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2014A)

Third, regarding the settlement of differences, China conveys enough confidence and optimism. On the one hand, 'with the growing interdependence between the two sides and the convergence of our interests, most problems will be smoothly and naturally solved during the deepening process of cooperation' (Song, 2010B). Meanwhile, Beijing believes that it has established effective methods and common principles to deal with problems and differences.

Certainly, the methods and principles it mentions are still very broad and lack any true significance:

‘After many years’ development, China and the EU have created a consensus that both sides should mutually respect, treat each other like equals, and maintain stability of China-EU relations. We have basically found effective ways to properly handle differences by dialogue and consultation.’

—Vice Foreign Minister Wang Chao (2015)

‘Understanding and supporting each other’s development path has been both sides’ basic idea... Inside the EU, there are more and more demands to require to adapt to China’s development and change the ways of dealing with China. More and more Europeans have started to see China from a strategic perspective, and believe that the development path chosen by Chinese people should be respected.’

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Song Zhe (2011D)

Meanwhile, in a large number of speeches, China also advocates exchanging mutual recognition. Such a suggestion is in line with Chinese facework, which emphasises the principle of reciprocity, namely, if I have given you face, you should actively give me face in return, and vice versa. In this sense, international recognition can have nothing to do with state quality or adherence to values and in fact becomes a lucrative investment to get something in return. Below are some typical discourses along these lines:

‘Our policy to support EU integration will not be changed; our position to welcome

the EU to play a greater role in the world will not be changed. China also hopes the EU can respect China's core interests and concerns with the same spirit.'

—Former Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Wu Hailong (2013)

'China will continue to view Europe as a strategic partner and support European integration. We believe that the European people will also support the Chinese people in pursuing a development model suited to China's national conditions.'

—President Xi Jinping (2014C)

'The EU promises to respect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity; China firmly supports European integration.'

—Chinese Ambassador to the EU, Yang Yanyi

(as cited in *Mission of China to the EU*, 2015)

China's logic takes a kind of 'transactional' approach: 'Just as we Chinese recognise your status and achievements, it is appropriate for you Europeans to in return give recognition to what we care about'. Some observers have been confused about China's real views, for example, does China really support the EU's integration or does it just want some reciprocal recognition?¹⁰⁴ Certainly, something like this would be ridiculous for many Europeans, as the European recognition of China's sovereignty, interests and development has nothing to do with whether

¹⁰⁴ Regarding China's attitudes about European integration, it is fairly plausible that Beijing philosophically supports it but practically may not wish to see it happen. Indeed, in many practices, 'Beijing shrewdly exploits divergences of position within the EU, playing the EU countries off against each other' (Mattlin, 2012, p. 193; see also Fox & Godement, 2009).

China supports the EU's integration.

5.5 Conclusion

5.5.1 Preliminary conclusion

The empirical findings of this research have shown that China's struggle for the EU's recognition is guided by face culture, which has manifested as three complementary role conceptions—the partner, weak and counterpart. Chinese official discourse steeped in face culture has become the context within which China's diplomacy can be explained and justified. These conclusions are supported by comparisons of China's discourse addressed to the ASEAN and AU and have also been proven by a range of discursive strategies, which are marked by culturally particular and peculiar ways of presenting itself as a partner, weak and a counterpart.

'Rarely does a foreign policy action serve one goal' (Larson, 2015, p. 332). Theoretically, international recognition is fungible, as recognition gained in one place can be transplanted to other place (Tang, 2005, p. 41), very often constituting 'an emotional belief concerning the overall nature of a social relationship' (Mercer, 2005, pp. 95-97). As revealed in the study, China's purpose is not limited to being recognised as a partner, a developing country, a historical victim and a counterpart, but also about making an aggregate impression advantageous to China itself. All of these constructed fractions of China perform the 'epistemic function of validating particular truth claims' (Haccke, 2005, p. 191) in the process of mutual

interaction and are aimed at attaining an overall recognition: **to be recognised as a capable and favourable actor in the eyes of Europeans.**

Struggle for international recognition is never a purely normative phenomenon. In the analysis of this research, it can be observed that many realistic considerations or expectations are also included in China’s struggle for the EU’s recognition. For China’s rulers, the most aspired kind of recognition from the EU is orientated towards the legitimacy of China’s ruling authority and its role as a reliable business and political partner. In other words, **regime security, economic interests and strategic coordination** are the key goals behind China’s entire search for recognition.

China’s concerns	China’s efforts in its struggle for the EU’s recognition
Regime security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Political and security partner: exclude some issues on account of its cooperation agenda; promote China’s principles on the centralism of sovereignty. <li>➤ Cultural partner: persuade Europeans to accept China’s particularities from the perspective of cultural relativism. <li>➤ Human rights partner: make human rights issues non-issues. <li>➤ Developing country: give prominence to the CCP’s legitimacy. <li>➤ Historical victim: explain why China chooses a different political path compared to the EU. <li>➤ The counterpart: show China as adopting some aspects of the Western

	model; neutralise some differences as normal phenomena.
Economic interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Economic partner: highlight the scope and prospects of cooperation; depict China as a reliable partner to the EU. ➤ Developing country and historical victim: gain the EU's sympathy; enlist more economical and technological support from the EU.
Strategic coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Political and security partner: strengthen cooperation in multiple spheres and at the global level. ➤ Historical victim: suggest that both sides should adopt the same attitude towards the recently aggressive Japan. ➤ The counterpart: prove that China and the EU are natural strategic partners in transforming the global system and upgrading their respective international standing.

Figure 5.13. China's actual concerns behind its struggle for recognition from the EU.

The main task of this study was to explore the cultural logic beneath the surface-level political discourse and concerns. Based on the research results, we can create an in-depth behavioural model affected by face culture, embodied in China's role performance with the EU.

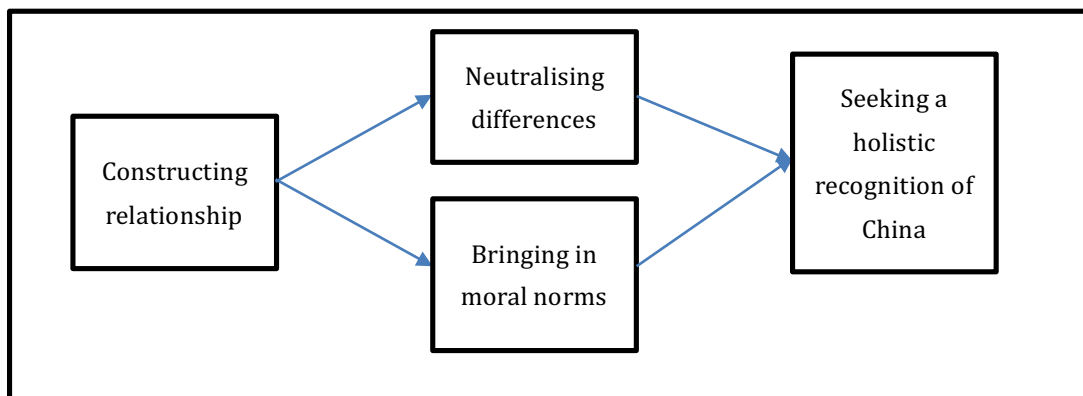


Figure 5.14. Behavioural model of China's struggle for the EU's recognition.

5.5.2 Relational orientation

What is characteristic of Chinese face culture is not a claim to individual freedom of action but a distinctive and perennial emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Mao, 1992, p. 467). The basic assumption of this entire study is that China's struggle for the EU's recognition is a kind of self-presentation in the relationship. It means that China's presentation to a large extent originates from the properties, conditions and states evinced in the China-EU relationship. Evidently, the empirical study proves such assumptions, and we can see that clarifying the nature of the relationship constitutes the first step of China's rationalisation of its role demands.

Relational ontology.

China's role performances seem to fit Chinese face culture first because they embody the approach of ontological position that is ingrained in face culture. This approach focuses on 'a processual ontology that shifted analytical attention away from entities (the substance) with static and given properties, be they persons or states, to relations under constant construction among those entities' (Bousquet & Curtis, 2011, p. 49). In line with China's discourses to the EU, ontologically, it can be found that China constantly strives to locate itself through relational judgment and comparison and, further, to enforce its perceived roles with regard to the EU.

Specifically, when China presents itself as a partner of the EU, the EU is formulated as a partner of China, and is also suggested to continually prioritise the maintenance and development of the relationship. When China prioritises its roles as a developing country and historical victim, it implies that the EU is a group of developed countries who are also past aggressors and are responsible for granting China support and acknowledgement. When China enumerates its similarities with the EU, both China and the EU are characterised as actors sharing common features from the actor-level and system-level perspectives. In this case, China and the EU are positioned in wider but not necessarily homogeneous collectives. Just like self-presentation to relationship in social life, what is being recognised here 'is not the identity of an individual but instead the position a person occupied in a particular relationship' (Ringmar, 2015, pp. 51-52). All of this entirely confirms Womack's viewpoint (2008, p. 265) about China's diplomacy i.e. 'from the Chinese perspective, international relations are not an area for the application of abstract norms to cases, but rather a set of particular international relationships, with concrete obligations within the context of each relationship'.

In addition, China passionately formulates or consolidates the relational symmetry in some roles (i.e. as the partner and counterpart), while maintaining the undisguised asymmetry of status in some roles (i.e. weak). Its position remains dynamic and changeable with regard to the EU, sometimes as an ambitious order maker, sometimes an equal interlocutor and sometimes as a modest seeker of help. It is striking that Chinese self-piety and self-boasting coexist simultaneously in its struggle for recognition.

Process oriented

One of the core Chinese philosophical views is that the universe is a dynamic system that changes constantly (Farras, 2016, p. 286). It is noteworthy that the Chinese pursuit of relationality is process orientated. 'Process' here refers to 'on-going interactive relations, embedded in social practice and producing social meaning' (Qin, 2009, p. 14). Henry Kissinger (2014, p. 226) has also noted this: 'Americans seek an outcome responding to immediate circumstances; Chinese concentrate on evolutionary change'. The ontological effect of such an orientation is that 'we should not conceptualize social actors as a complete and distinct unit, but as flexible entities that are in the process of continuously becoming' (Schneider, 2014, p. 693). In the sense of methodology, such a thinking pattern is embodied as an introspective method based on the process of interaction rather than explicit norms of appropriateness (Kavalski, 2014, p. 13). A kind of ungrounded optimism exists in this logic: 'As long as the process of constructing relations can be maintained, relations will at least not deteriorate to an irreversible point beyond redemption' (Qin, 2011, p. 138).

In the same sense, Chinese officials, unlike their European counterparts or scholars, rarely express any dissatisfaction or confusion about the ambiguous nature of the China-EU partnership. For the Chinese, sustained interactions in the name of a China-EU partnership, even if some of them lack substantial content or shared value, have already materialised the essence of the term partnership i.e. maintaining relational stability and predictability. Likewise, China's attitude towards the differences show the same logic process: 'The problems we have in front of us are not lasting but temporary ones, which are just passing swirls in the river of

China-EU relations' (Song, 2010B). Another case is that Beijing always reiterates that there are growing common interests and values between China and the EU when shaping its role as the EU's counterpart. Obviously, China's 'counterpart' is not an established entity with certain immanent characteristics but still an on-going process, which is supposed to have a generative nature of creating similarities and accumulating inter-subjective recognition.

5.5.3 Neutralising differences.

When relations and related roles are made certain, China's role performance is further characterised by actions intended to obscure any differences between itself and the EU.

As theorised by Derrida, the Western philosophical tradition rests on binary opposites—unity/diversity, presence/absence, universality/specificity, democracy/dictatorship, civilised/uncivilised etc. (Critchley, 2005, p. 265). Following this logic, much of the EU's diplomatic discourse manifests as oppositional differentiation. For example, regarding political value, there must be 'a morally superior identity of democratic juxtaposed to the inferior identity of non-democratic' (Rumelili, 2004, p. 31). The EU always positions itself as a normative superior, and the 'other' as the inferior object that 'needs to be intervened/missionized/enlightened/saved/democratized' (Musliu & Orbie, 2014, p. 417; see also Gong, 1984, p. 22; Scheipers & Sicurelli, 2008). According to Chinese philosopher Zhao Dingyang (2006, p. 38), 'such a pattern may enhance the integration of the EU itself but deepens the EU's separation from the world'.

On the contrary, 'the Chinese mindset cannot be understood without supplanting the either/or mindset with a paradoxical integration (i.e. both/and) framework, in which opposites are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive' (Chen, 2002, p. 189). Seeking almost instinctive similarities, different and even opposite elements in a synthetic whole is always a characteristic of the Chinese mind (Solé-Farràs, 2016, p. 5). This research has proven this cultural preference: China's struggle for the EU's recognition always avoids absolute alterity. From China's role performances, all of its three roles are perceivably aimed at jumping out of such a European dichotomy and dismantling the antithetical positions constructed by the Europeans.

In social life, Chinese people seek face by avoiding the public disclosure of interpersonal differences and reducing any harmony-threatening activities. Similarly, there is a consistent principle underpinning China's search for recognition from the EU: 'Do not let difference become the resistance of development of China-EU relations.'¹⁰⁵ On the one hand, China admits the existence of some differences between itself and the EU in its implicit way. On the other hand, more noticeably, the Chinese spare no effort to mask many differences that may embarrass them, to advocate that both sides should transcend¹⁰⁶ their differences to maintain a 'harmonious' relationship, to neutralise differences as a 'normal' phenomenon arising from the process of international interactions and to balance the existing normative asymmetries of the EU-China relationship. For example, *partner/partnership*, suggested by China, has proved to be a discourse instrument that 'challenges the references to incompatibilities and to a

¹⁰⁵ This saying appears repeatedly in China's official discourse with the EU.

¹⁰⁶ 'Transcend' here for the Chinese refers to a diverse range of behavioural strategies, including turning a blind eye, pursuing mutual tolerance, avoiding open debate or criticism or seeking solutions to reconcile differences.

rivalry/friendship dichotomy' (Feng & Huang, 2014, p. 47). In the overarching framework of a partnership, China expects to 'set an example (with the EU) of different civilizations seeking harmony without uniformity, promoting diversity, learning from each other' (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2014A). As such, when China promotes its role as a developing country and a historical victim, it euphemistically reminds the EU of the 'fact' that some differences are endogenous to the objective material conditions or even historical mistakes made by Europeans. The implication is that the EU has no normative privilege to conceptualise the differences by their own logic or to require China to make changes it proposes.

One of the rules of Chinese face culture is self-restraint or not showing off. In other words, the '[Chinese] active pursuit of face is at the cost of each individual's uniqueness' (Chang, 2001, p. 158). Correspondingly, besides conceptualising differences in its harmonising way, research shows that China also depersonalises itself to be a typically ordinary international actor, a plausibly favourable counterpart, part of a wider collective with the EU. All these roles—the partner, weak and counterpart—have the effect of shifting the audience's attention to some prototypical properties shared by China and the EU or by most countries. Logically, as China's unique features are obscured, the differences between China and the EU are accordingly obscured. Viewed from the perspective of China's discourses to the EU, there is almost no prominence given to China's unique features (e.g. its socialist system, the leadership of the Communist Party etc.); 'no messianism of exporting one ultimate value or system' (Zhang, 2011, p. 15); no challenge to the liberal principles the current international order rests on. These characteristics, in accordance with Shambaugh (2013, p. 525), are intended to pander to

the lowest common denominator, 'usually adopting the safest and least controversial position'.

Moreover, what can be observed in China's role performance is a kind of accommodationalism i.e. China adjusts itself to present a favourable appearance that incorporates and exemplifies the EU's values and to use vague and general expressions suggestive of the existing/possible common ground between both sides. Certainly, many times, China's accommodations are an overt form of superficial conformity; however, one culturally particular point is that the Chinese are not subject to the same pressure for consistency between inner belief and outer behaviour as are Westerners (Hiniker, 1969, pp. 157-176).

When most scholars (including Chinese scholars) discuss China's struggle for international recognition, they habitually focus on the emphasis on alterity or possible challenges to the existing system of order. Consequently, China's search must 'sow the seeds of a tragic sequence of identity-based conflict' (Greenhill, 2008, p. 355). However, one main contribution of this study is to show an inclination rooted in China's mind-set and behaviours—China would like to minimise the negative influence of differences and to raise the possibility (or create an acceptable illusion) of coexistence and mutual tolerance. What Beijing is never tired of emphasising is that China and the EU are not diametrically opposed and homologous but are interdependent building blocks that come together to comprise a great whole.

5.5.4 Moral norms

'Being innocent, impotent but moral is better received than being strong and outspoken in the

Chinese society' (Lee, 2013, p. 520). The other main approach that emerges in China's role performance for gaining recognition is the introduction of its own self-righteous moral norms in the struggle of recognition. Certainly, moral judgment and ethical persuasion are absolutely generalised behaviours in international relations. As Han Mogenthau (1967, p. 10) has noted, 'all nations are tempted... to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe'.

Morality, especially the rule of *renqing* that emphasises empathy and reciprocity (see Section 3.5.3), is the guiding principle behind Chinese facework (Qin, 2011, p. 134). The Chinese always mobilise morality to mediate, coordinate and harmonise relationships and then to seek social recognition. As such, it can be observed that China's face diplomacy is not about applying abstract or universal norms to cases but about espousing a set of moral rules defined within the context of a particular relationship. In other words, the core belief can be interpreted as follows: 'one's rights and obligations toward another person depend in the first place on the kind of relationship one has with that person' (Zhang, 2015, p. 19).

Role assignments between China and the EU play serve to amplify the moral justification of China's aspiration for the EU's recognition (Liao, 2013, p. 156). Specifically, as both China and the EU have been 'partners', the EU should reduce its epistemological claims for theorising China's individual qualities (especially special ones compared with the EU) and focus more on the stability and development of the relationship; as China has been and will be largely weaker than the EU, the EU should adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards China and respect China's choices no matter how they seem to deviate from its expectations; as China shares a

myriad of individual and systematic attributes with the EU, there is no reason not to profess mutual respect and tolerance towards each other. As per this logic, China's diplomatic discourse, more often than not, appears not only to be rational and persuasive but, above all, morally right and, sometimes, emotional, according to the cultural-political framework of face culture.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

拿破仑说过，中国是一头沉睡的狮子，当这头睡狮醒来时，世界都会为之发抖。中国这头狮子已经醒了，但这是一只和平的、可亲的、文明的狮子。

—习近平

'Napoleon said that China was a sleeping lion and when this lion awoke, it would shake the world.

Now the lion China has awoken, but it is a peaceful, amiable and civilized lion.'

—Xi Jinping¹⁰⁷

As a long-time observer, I have witnessed a lot of China's continuous fascination with international recognition and its frequent frustration with still being viewed as a marginalised other. In recent years, as China has taken more initiatives to promote its soft power by hosting

¹⁰⁷ This passage has been cited from Xi's speech at the Meeting Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations.

grand international gatherings one after another, the foreign media have been keen to report on how China is obsessed with its face diplomacy; however, the official Chinese media tends to emphasise that today's China is more pragmatic and is bidding goodbye to face diplomacy. No matter from which perspective you analyse it, one thing seems to be certain for everyone: face culture, as China's traditional and mass culture, is still 'one crucial element influencing the manner in which China relates with other nations' (Ho, 2015, p. 3).

Before this research, like many other observers, I regarded face culture as an inherent weakness of the Chinese nation. It seems only to lead to 'a vain China', which either squanders large quantities of resources to present an 'ideal' image or adopts all possible means to conceal or undo foreign criticism. However, after this study, I realise that most people in fact lack a clear and complete knowledge about face culture, and, consequently, the role of face culture in China's diplomacy is commonly misunderstood and then stereotyped.

The final chapter of this thesis has a two-fold aim. First, I intend to summarise the main findings of this thesis; second, I transcend the general conclusions and address some profound and elaborate insights into some research questions about China's struggle for international recognition.

6.1 Main Findings

Chinese face culture

Just like a spider web, a person's behaviors may seem infinitely complicated, but

they always have a common clue and clear designs. After understanding their designs, we will discover that various different factors are in fact connected by an undoubted web, and many seemingly contradictory activities stem from the same substructure. (Zheng, 2012, p. 93)

The core question of this research is, how does Chinese face culture influence China's struggle for international recognition? Just as the passage cited above notes, the research assumes face culture is a web of meanings ingrained in the Chinese mind and plays a remarkable role in shaping China's seemingly contradictory identities and behaviours.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the conceptual richness and methodological diversity of face culture in Chinese society. *Face* has been defined in a universal sense i.e. **face is the public image that a person claims for him/herself and is also recognised by others**. The fundamental aim of face concern is being recognised by others i.e. social recognition. Because of face concern, people in general have two behavioural objectives: to seek face and to save face when face is lost. As theorised by social psychology, facework is a typical kind of self-presentation, which intrinsically consists of self-presentation to others and to relationship.

Through a detailed cultural analysis, this paper further suggests that **Chinese face culture emphasises the role of self-presentation to relationship in its struggle for social recognition**. Specifically, the core cultural norm of Chinese facework is 'to achieve and foster harmonious interdependence with your audiences' (Kim & Nam, 1998, p. 526). Ontologically, what is ultimately recognised 'is not the identity of an individual but instead the position a

person occupies in a particular relationship' (Ringmar, 2015, pp. 51-52)

Regarding China's self-presentation to relationship, two behavioural patterns of its face culture are proposed as below:

- Behavioural pattern I: Chinese face culture encourages people to show superiority when seeking recognition.
- Behavioural pattern II: When one perceives oneself at the same or at an inferior status in an interaction, one tends to present oneself as an acquaintance, as a weak and as a counterpart in order to seek recognition.

These arguments can be depicted as a flow chart as shown in Figure 6.1.

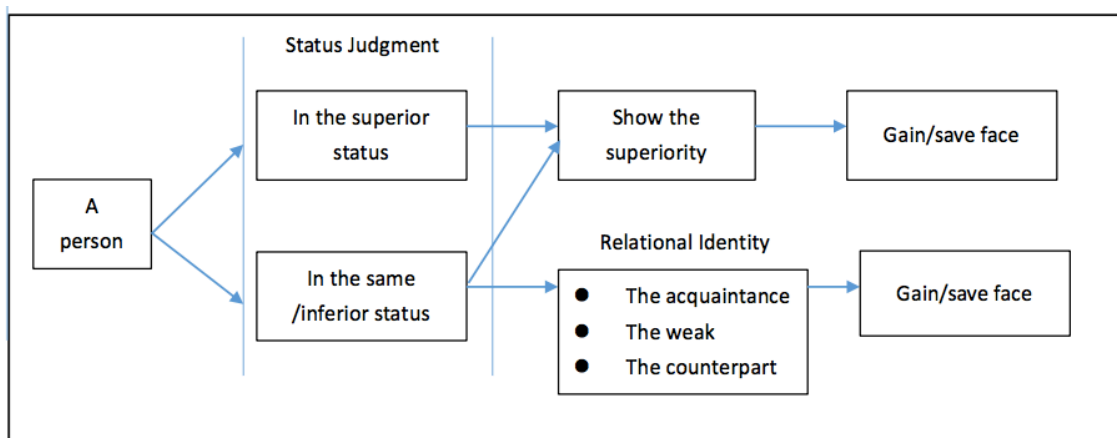


Figure 6.1. Behavioural patterns of Chinese self-presentation to relationship.

Regarding the behaviour patterns of face culture and role theory, the thesis puts forward two assumptions about China's diplomatic behaviours in seeking international recognition:

- Behavioural pattern I: China tends to perform the role conception of a major power in order to seek international recognition.

- Behavioural pattern II: When China perceives itself at the same or inferior status in an interaction, it tends to present itself as an acquaintance, weak and as a counterpart in order to seek international recognition.

Wolf (2014, p. 470) contends, 'often we [Westerners] have some broad ideas about foreigners' symbolic needs but are unaware of specific qualities or achievements they may want to see appreciated'. This research aims to detect the 'specific qualities or achievements' that China pursues and shows in practice. Generally, Chapters 4 and 5 have fully confirmed the validity of the above hypotheses, and it can be concluded that face culture is an explicit behavioural rule guiding China's struggle for international recognition.

Benign major power

Face is a Chinese social ideology that legitimatises pre-existing hierarchical rectitude. In Chinese society, in which Confucian hierarchy and decorum are still highly valued and strictly followed, people sincerely believe that social recognition, in many cases, is the pure obedience of social hierarchy and the acknowledgement of relational asymmetry. As a social rule, superiors are endowed with legitimacy to gain face from subordinates, and subordinates believe that it is their duty as well as virtue to actively give face to superiors. According to this Chinese logic, no matter what position (superior or inferior) a person occupies in an

interaction, it is reasonable for him or her to highlight and even exaggerate his or her superiority. It is expected that through such behaviours, the asymmetry of the relationship can be confirmed, magnified or balanced, and then social recognition can be gained/saved.

It is evidenced that face culture has been institutionalised as constitutive and regulative elements of China's role conception of a 'benign major power'. According to the paradigm of face culture, seeking international recognition as a major power is an overriding diplomatic objective for the Chinese. In the Chinese mind, only when it is admitted and treated as a major power by other countries is China authentically accorded its due respect and sufficient ontological security. In other words, the minimum international recognition aims at no loss in its perceived status as a major power, and the thin recognition it pursues is essentially a kind of equality among major powers instead of among all the international actors.

Following the relational thinking and hierarchical view embedded in face culture, **China's conceptualisation as a major power is essentially a sense of centrality**. For China, the ideal international recognition as a major power would not only be a confirmation of its power but more an automatic tendency of movement towards the symbolic centre of international society. A predilection to formalism is a key characteristic of China's identity constructions and role performances. Coherently, China's search for identification often ends with ostensible recognition or temporary praise, instead of sincere and consistent acknowledgement. It is acceptable for China that 'there is a discrepancy between diplomacy rhetoric and diplomacy in its practical form of policies and actions' (Scott, 2015, p. 261).

As revealed in Chapter 3, Chinese face culture maintains the consciousness of moral boundaries, expresses the rule of *renqing* and puts forth a behavioural code for those who are superior. **China's struggle for recognition does involve some righteous and credible aspects:** First, the pursuit of superiority is believed to be not a battle for the zero-sum resource of social status but more as cooperation for achieving harmony in relationships. The dynamics of China's struggle for international recognition are positively reciprocal with all the actors engaged in a common orientation to raise and attend to each other's face. Second, avoiding public confrontation among countries is a compelling principle for China in order to preserve both its and other's face. Third, closely related to the reciprocal principle, China seeks to be recognised as a major power worthy of enduring trust and cooperation.

The author particularly notes that under the influence of face culture, **China is unlikely to become an altruist or moral perfectionist.** To begin with, China's struggle for recognition still safeguards a strictly hierarchical and explicitly inegalitarian world. Second, beneath the veneer of harmony and politeness, China's struggle for the status of major power is displayed and conducted in a distinctly transactional way. Many behaviours eventually become the exchange of interests. Besides, the avoidance of public criticism and conflict deafens the Chinese government and public to what others really perceive and think about them.

China's role performance as a benign major power can be observed saliently in many diplomatic activities involving a show of its hospitality and generosity e.g. large-scale international gatherings, diplomatic visits, diplomatic discourse, economic diplomacy and external assistance and its response to foreign criticism or crises. China tends to highlight

achievements and cooperation regardless of the cost and to solve conflicts or react to criticism in a tacit manner. Compared with many other countries, China focuses much more on the symbols rather than the substance of diplomacy. Most of the time, China is fond of using economical means and financial assets to purchase recognition.

A multifaceted China.

The core value of this research is the finding that China's hybrid identities are partly endogenous, and face culture is an enduring dynamic of creating multiple and ambivalent national identities.

In Chinese facework, when one is at the same or at an inferior status compared with one's audience, one has the tendency to display one's qualities in order to construct/reconstruct the relationship so as to gain social recognition. The author further suggests that there are three relational identities embedded in this behavioural pattern: the acquaintance, the weak and the counterpart. Chinese people believe that social images and behaviours rooted in these three identities can effectively close the gap between themselves and others who are superior to them, cultivate good relationships and, finally, bring about the expected gain of face.

This research illustrates that Chinese decision-makers, scholars and the public commonly regard the EU as an undoubted major power, which has a higher or equal international status compared with China. Additionally, facts have proved that China always has extensive demands and continuously strives to seek recognition from the EU, because of which this study has

sufficient empirical proof.

This empirical study has demonstrated that **China's struggle for the EU's recognition is guided by face culture, which has manifested as three complementary role conceptions—the partner, the weak and the counterpart.** This conclusion is proven through comparisons between China's official discourse addressed to the EU versus those addressed to the ASEAN and AU. It has also been proven by a spectrum of discursive strategies, which are marked by culturally particular and peculiar ways of presenting itself as a partner, a developing country, a historical victim and a counterpart, like the EU. Obviously, China's goal is not limited to being recognised as fulfilling these roles with regard to the EU. All of these constructed roles are aimed at attaining overall recognition for the nature of their relationship—**to be recognised as a capable and favourable actor in the eyes of Europeans.** China's struggle for the EU's recognition also includes many realistic considerations or expectations. Regime security, economic interests and strategic coordination are the most pressing objectives behind China's search for recognition from the EU.

This struggle for the EU's acknowledgement also reveals a kind of relational ontology. It is revealed that China, according to its cultural logic, tries to locate itself and the EU in various constructed relationships and shifts the EU's attention away from China's individual properties to the established or the potential nature of the Sino-EU relationship. Specifically, when China presents itself as a partner of the EU, the EU is also formulated as a partner of China, who is suggested to continue prioritising the maintenance and development of the relationship. When China prioritises its role as a developing country and historical victim, it implies that the EU is a

group of developed countries and past aggressors who are responsible for granting China support and acknowledgement. When China enumerates its similarities with the EU, it actually characterises both China and the EU as actors sharing common features from the actor-level and system-level perspectives. In this case, China and the EU are positioned in wider but not necessarily homogeneous collectives. What Beijing wants to achieve is to shape the EU's recognition of various collectives and then attain recognition towards itself. All of this entirely confirms Womack's viewpoint (2008, p. 265) about China's diplomacy i.e. 'from the Chinese perspective, international relations are not an area for the application of abstract norms to cases, but rather a set of particular international relationships, with concrete obligations within the context of each relationship'.

In order to substantiate the content of the relationship, China's struggle for the EU's recognition mainly manifests in two behaviours. The first behaviour is **neutralising the differences between the two parties**. On the one hand, at least in terms of discourse, China tries to escape the oppositional differentiation constructed by the EU and to neutralise any differences—especially conceptual differences—between the two sides and present them as a normal phenomenon arising from the process of bilateral interactions. On the other hand, China has an inclination to depersonalise itself to be seen as an ordinary international actor in the Western sense, and then to obscure its uniqueness and differences compared with the EU. The other behaviour is **introducing its self-righteous moral norms in relational management**. The rule of *renqing*, which emphasises empathy and reciprocity, is the guiding principle that China continuously proclaims and references. It is not about the utilisation of

abstract or universal norms to cases, but about espousing a set of moral rules defined within the context of a particular relationship.

As a whole, by being an essential part of China's worldview, face culture provides behavioural models for studying how cultural factors contribute to China's struggle for international recognition. The core argument is that, for the Chinese, international recognition is integrally related to the understanding and construction of a relationship.

6.2 China's Subjectivity: Being Outwardly Flexible but Inwardly Determinate

This research is closely related to a fundamental question regarding China's diplomacy i.e. how does China regard itself and engage with others? One dominant academic view of this question is that China lacks sufficient subjectivity and seems to be a 'fledging normative power' when defining and expressing itself (Kavalski, 2013, p. 253).

The theoretical understanding of state subjectivity is mainly drawn from the social and theoretical tradition of individuals, according to which subjectivity is 'a function of narratives, of stories that constitute our diverse experiences as those of a coherent Self' (Ringmar, 1996, p. 450). According to Wendt, states are also made up of 'us' narratives as opposed to 'them' narratives, which can constitute collective consciousness and memories (Wendt, 2004, p. 313).

Subjectivity, in the eyes of many scholars, is a rare commodity for today's China. Shambaugh (2013, p. 316) maintains that 'China is a confused and conflicted rising power undergoing an identity crisis of significant proportions'. Geeraerts (2013, p. 61) argues that China 'is

constantly involved in a tug-of-war between its weak power identity [developing country] and strong power identity [great power]'. Scholars often attribute a 'lack of subjectivity' to identity disorder or incomplete identity construction. Ren Jiantao (2016, p. 2) believes that 'China's identification as an international identity suffers from a persistent disorder, oscillating between self-conceit and self-abasement'. Qin Yaqing (2011, p. 137) claims that China has an identity crisis at the heart of its diplomacy and, on many occasions, it cannot clarify its national role and position.

However, from a theoretical perspective, the author contends that a state's struggle for international recognition originates mainly because the state is quite certain about what it wants to be and about the fact that it can justify being treated with more consideration (Wolf, 2011, p. 109). As Williams (1997, p. 349) argues, 'when states enter into the process of recognition, what they seek is recognition of their independence as an end in itself'. In addition, many observers are 'standing in the shoes of others, looking at China' (Kavalski, 2013, p. 257), ignoring the changing and fluid nature of Chinese behaviour. Unsurprisingly, they draw their conclusions 'without much appreciation of the deeper identity-structural disposition of the "Chinese" self' (Forsby, 2011, p. 8).

Face culture provides us with insights into China's subjectivity in international relations and also problematises the previous arguments of scholars. One central argument of this research is that **China has an unyielding sense of subjectivity in its diplomacy**. In the process of seeking international recognition, China is very clear about what it wants to be and what it must defend, and it can represent different and even self-contradictory identities to different

nations, often at the same time. 'Being flexible on the outside but determinate inside' is a classical Confucian creed, which is also appropriate to describe China's subjectivity. In terms of China's diplomatic language, which is often mentioned, China sticks to 'the combination of consistency in principle and flexibility in tactic' [Chinese: 将原则的坚定性与策略的灵活性相结合].

According to the research findings, China's role conceptions and performances are indeed relationship-centred and 'the other' based; nevertheless, at a deeper level, they are still subject/self-centric and oriented towards perceived values. Kavalski (2013, p. 258) argues that 'it is a routinized practice that international actors attempt to take control over the process of meaning-creation by anchoring their identity to explicit material practices'. Such a situation also exists in the China-EU interactions: On the one hand, the EU brands itself as a normative power, promoting the diffusion of a set of norms relating to democracy, human rights, market economy and so on in its relations with China. On the other hand, despite avoiding an open ideological competition or confrontation, China still persists in using its own cultural instincts to establish manifold standards about what is considered 'normal'¹⁰⁸ in international community, and to 'silently' countervail part of the EU's socialising influences by obscuring differences or by introducing its own favoured moral norms. Many aspects of China's role performances are indeed intended 'to deconstruct Western knowledge of China and at the same time to explore various possibilities to reconstruct China's own cultural identity and

¹⁰⁸ This is inspired by Manner's arguments (2002, p. 239; 2008, p. 65) i.e. the core of a normative power lies in its ability to shape conceptions of what is normal in international relations.

national subjectivity' (Guo, 1999, p. 214).

There are many platitudes about how China has paid little heed to European values and how Beijing regularly contravenes or even undermines them (Fox & Godement, 2009, p. 16). Nevertheless, from China's perspective, the EU model still 'has a lot of value for China in order to get its people rich after getting its nation strong', and is still 'an important source of inspiration for China regarding its peaceful rise and the building of a harmonious world' (Wang, 2011, p. 43). According to the research results, a more accurate argument is that the resilient China always pays a lot of heed to European values for seeking recognition, and meanwhile, Beijing artfully and implicitly contravenes or even undermines some of them. Nowadays, it is not China that faces the identity dilemma but the EU, whose commitment to democracy and human rights very often has to make room for giving face to one of its 'strategic partners' like China or Russia. As noted by Renard and Biscop (2010, p. 1), 'seemingly evident, it is actually not that clear which values and interests the EU seeks to safeguard, and which kind of international actor it wants to be'.

Such subjectivity is also helpful to shed light on China's multifaceted nature. An analysis from the perspective of face culture helps bring to light insights that may be less visible when viewed from other analytical perspectives i.e. how China consciously constructs its competing or contested roles and images in the sphere of international relations. In order to gain face, the Chinese commonly find it reasonable to maintain many different social selves and present the appropriate one according to the relational context. By this logic, the juxtapositions of China's diversified and even paradoxical national roles are also viewed as a normal phenomenon by the

Chinese. As seen in this study, China intentionally takes on different roles in front of the EU and its perceived inferiors, the ASEAN and AU. Even with the EU, China is able to inhabit a role somewhere between a confident major power and a modest weak state. Such behavioural trends, in most cases, have been proven to be not a result of identity disorder but a consequence of conscious manipulation led by clear subjectivity.

To sum up, **China maintains paradoxical identities and remains ambivalent about its relations with the world, which is a reflection of subjectivity.** Face culture not only provides rhetorical devices or discourse frameworks to sugar-coat China but also serves the profoundly intellectual purpose to construct the content and orientation of its existence.

6.3 Intricate Dilemmas for China

Former Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fu Yin (2008) once said, 'the wall that stands in China's way to the world is so thick'. In recent years, the Chinese government has invested huge resources into multidimensional and multinational efforts to boost the country's international recognition. Yet, to date, these efforts have had little payoff (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 310).¹⁰⁹ Even much of the recognition China has gained is unstable and falsehearted. An ironic fact is that 'the strong desire for international affirmation often leads China's elites to present a very bad face to the world' (Gries, 1999, pp. 68-69).

¹⁰⁹ Chinese scholars basically refuse to admit this dilemma. Many of them argue that China just lacks effective means of communication or the power of international discourse, and Westerners will give China the recognition it desires as long as China uses the 'correct' language or enters into a 'shared' discourse space.

In Chapter 3, the author divides facework into two categories—self-presentation to others and self-presentation to relationship. The former involves seeking recognition by meeting others' expectations, while the latter involves seeking recognition by creating and manipulating an existing relationship. Applying this to China's practices, we can ascertain that China confronts three intricate dilemmas when seeking international recognition from Western powers:

The first dilemma is that due to huge differences in political regimes and the intractable conflict of values between China and the West, **the PRC is by no means at a point where it can meet European and American expectations** (Geeraerts, 2013, p. 64). In more blunt terms, as long as the CCP maintains its rule in China, it will be impossible for China to gain complete international recognition from the Western powers—both sides are very clear about this. In some situations, China has been numb to the endless stream of Western criticism or complaints, as it knows that nothing it does will change this legitimacy deficit.

This dilemma further results in a potentially aggressive China. The Chinese word '撕破脸' [English: cast aside all considerations of face] is used to describe an emotional reaction to an extremely hostile situation in social life. When Chinese people have to 撕破脸 and feel no necessity of preserving their face, they will forget even basic politeness in a flash, allow themselves to act like a shrew and make no effort to conceal their fierce and arrogant side (Chen, 2004, p. 221). Sinologist Holcombe (2001(1895), p. 190) exposed China's true colours in his book *Real Chinaman*.

This habit of repression and the misrepresentation of feelings has given the outside

world the idea that, as a nation, the Chinese are stolid, indifferent and lack nerves. Such is not the case. The Chinese are in fact keenly sensitive, proud and passionate. As might be expected, when provoked beyond endurance, they give free rein to their feelings, and the result, be it grief or anger, is as extreme and unreasonable, from our (Westerners') standpoint, as their ordinary suppression of emotion is absurd and unnecessary.

In much the same way, when China feels there is no hope of gaining recognition, it will perform more aggressively than foreigners can imagine. There is a compelling need to wipe out and reverse the consequence of losing face, and the Chinese tend to swing abruptly between the two extremes of 'disciplined order and explosive outbursts' (Lee, 2013, p. 520). China's reaction to the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize is a very typical case. Awarding this world-class prize to Liu Xiaobo, a human rights activist as well as criminal serving a sentence in a Chinese prison, was expectedly regarded by Beijing as an open and intentional insult to China's political and legal system. As reported by *The Telegraph*, 'China responded like a scolded child, determined to spoil the party, doing everything in its power to undermine the Nobel ceremony' (Peter, 2010). In Swaine's words (2010, p. 1), China is finally 'revealing its true colors'.

One can feel confused about such contradictory behaviour—'if China does care about its international image, why would it behave in a way that hurts its own national image?' (Chen, 2014). This research hopes to provide a plausible explanation: face culture represses China's aggressive side and also easily triggers its truculent side. It is not that China is an actor 'basically lowest and provocative possible and defensive in nature' (Zhang, 2010, p. 281). What

this research repeatedly demonstrates is that, as argued by Sole-Farra (2016, p. 12), ‘absolute distinctions such as those indicated by the “either-or” point of view do not meet with the approval of the Chinese mind; accordingly, the Chinese can be at one and the same time both extremely idealistic and extremely realistic.’

The other dilemma is that **China’s self-presentation to relationship, intended to gain international recognition, can easily lead to even more misunderstandings and bewilderment, eliciting quite the opposite effect.** The cultural analysis presented in this paper shows that self-presentation to others is conditioned by external inter-subjective expectations, but self-presentation to relationship is more internally conditioned and governed. Under the influence of face culture, China’s struggle for international recognition reflects a dominance of ego expectation and self-righteous moral appeal, while any different expectations from the West become subordinated. This leads to one of the most common mistakes in intercultural communication i.e. ‘others want the kind of things that are treasured in our society’ (Kopra, 2012, p. 52).

China wishes to be recognised as a ‘benign major power’; however, most foreign audiences cannot see its benignity and remain vigilant regarding its hubris and unforeseeable influence. On many occasions, here is simply a lack of basic trust between China and others. ‘The larger and more powerful China appears to be, the harder it is to develop and maintain strategic trust’ (Cook, 2015, p. 130). Worse still, ‘the “ethical argument”¹¹⁰ frequently cited by the Chinese state to justify its entitlement to legitimate power status on the world stage does not effectively

¹¹⁰ The ‘ethical argument’ here refers to many arguments about China’s national particularity.

persuade the international audience, especially Western powers' (Liao, 2013, p. 552).

Many experts claim that since 2008, Beijing has manifested an explicitly assertive attitude towards the outside world. One argument even claims that in 2009 and 2010, China's assertiveness resulted in it losing many benefits it had gained from two decades of friendship diplomacy (Overholt, 2012, p. 129). When China shows off its power, generosity and hospitality, it is usually followed by doubt and suspicion instead of the recognition and praise it expects. Does China then become even more aggressive? Does it begin to reconstruct the international order as per its own desires? Does China begin to incessantly challenge the powers that be? Does it persist in following its own way no matter what others say? In recent years, these questions in the context of China's diplomacy have become focal points in the Western media and the international political community. Both Americans and Europeans have a shared worry that is difficult to eliminate—the worry is the suddenness with which the entire perspective of the political world will be or has been changed by China (Lindemann, 2013, p. 131).

In addition, the ambiguity of China's discourse often further obfuscates what foreigners know about the 'real' China. What China pursues is this: 'It could either painstakingly yield without clearly yielding or confront without clearly confronting' (Shih & Yin, 2013, p. 74), in order to preserve face on all sides and still maintain its freedom to manoeuvre. However, things often go awry, and Chinese wisdom cannot be appreciated by Westerners on every such occasion.

In both its role presentations, many facts and values China claims are in fact devoid of empirical context and concrete behaviours. 'Chinese politics often dictates that "surface and

reality differ” (Gries, 2004, p. 9). For the Chinese, social recognition never has to do with facts but form. This research also shows that China easily turns its struggle for international recognition into a remarkably theatrical process or a meticulous construction of formalism. As a result, the image and the behaviour can be de-coupled and have nothing to do with one another. There is very often a huge gap between China’s claimed identity and its diplomatic behaviour. For China, this is not a serious problem. Chan (1999, p. 59) summarises this well:

If China is blamed for inconsistencies in its behavior because its tactics contradict its principles, the Chinese would brush aside these criticisms without feeling any sense of guilt. Rather, they regard such practices as an acceptable and legitimate way of tackling problems.

However, such inconsistency in the eyes of outsiders is hypocritical. Consequently, much of the international recognition China has gained is still tentative and indeterminate.¹¹¹ The Western powers sometimes offer China their possibly real or possibly falsehearted recognition, but this does not mean that they are always willing to hide their true feelings or act according to China’s script.

¹¹¹ From China’s perspective, this kind of recognition is also acceptable, because ‘others’ recognition always brings us [Chinese] pleasure, even hypocritical recognition; nevertheless, others’ derecognition always annoys us, even if it is sincere or authentic’ (Tang & Qi, 2008, p. 65).

6.4 Not Easy to Say Goodbye to Face Diplomacy

Chapter 4 has noted that one prevailing view in Chinese society is that it is time to say goodbye to face diplomacy. China's official media does preach that China today focuses on its national interests and its people's well-being rather than the country's or its senior leaders' face. However, the reality is that face culture still persists in China's diplomatic practices, and many of its endeavours pertaining to the struggle for international recognition are still imprinted with the characteristics of face culture.

Generally, it is not easy for China to say goodbye to face diplomacy. The fundamental reason for this is that face culture as a universal tenet in Chinese society is a dominant factor that profoundly influences Chinese behaviour and characteristics. 'Six decades of Communist rule has not changed the Chinese soul, which developed over thousands of years' (Mahbubani, 2008, p. 149). At least in the foreseeable future, we cannot see this culture irreversibly weakening or perishing.

From a more realistic perspective, another major reason is that face culture is a national treasure for Chinese authorities on which they build national sentiment and solidarity. Chapter 3 has clearly illustrated that 'Chinese people are concerned not only about enhancing or losing face of one's "small self", but also about enhancing or losing face of one's "big self" arising from significant moral or social episodes' (Hwang & Han, 2012, p. 479). Today's Chinese rulers take advantage of face culture to manipulate public ideas and behaviours in the context of international politics. Anything that goes against the Chinese government or leaders can be

portrayed as a loss of face for the whole country; any endeavour to present China as an ideal country can be interpreted as the unshakable obligation of every citizen. Even if a Chinese citizen wants to criticise his or her government publicly or in a foreign country, he or she will be criticised for damaging the face of not only the 'big self' of China but also the 'small self' of the person themselves. In this sense, face culture, patriotism and nationalism have mingled, and thin recognition of the state's equality and thick recognition of the state's uniqueness have also been confused.

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 4

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Chapter 5

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