More Than Relationship: Chinese Interaction and the Principle of *Kuan-Hsi*

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Through an interpretive analysis of interviews of Chinese in Taiwan, it is demonstrated that the principle of kuan-hsi (relations) undergirds the functional aspects of Chinese interpersonal relationships. Originally based on the teachings of Confucian philosophy, and grounded in the notion of the family as microcosm of the larger society, kuan-hsi has evolved into a social resource in a sense somewhat at odds with the Confucian ideal, that is, more as an interpersonal resource in Chinese society. Findings of the study help to reevaluate the commonly held perceptions that Chinese are collective, concerned with social harmony over the individual, and indirect in their communication.

KEY CONCEPTS *Chinese, Confucianism, Interpersonal Communication, Interpersonal Relationship.*

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It is a truism that human existence cannot be divorced from the complexity of interpersonal relationship. This truism, however, has received a variety of interpretations across various cultures. In the Chinese culture, for example, Confucianism, as one of the most influential streams of philosophy in Chinese history, has advanced moral teachings based on interpersonal relationship as the proper place where one learns humanity. As Chan (1963) points out, ". . . to Confucianists, the virtue of humanity is meaningless unless it is involved in actual human relationships" (p. 104). As is evident in the Confucian classics, such as *The Great Learning* (Chapter 3) and *The Middle Way* (Chapter 20) (see Chan, 1963, p. 70), this harmonious interaction among people of different relations serves as the basis of society. Formed by the conflation of Confucian philosophy with other schools of thought, the essential character of the Chinese mind lies in the "relation" of things and, from this base, advances into an analysis of interpersonal relationships.

As the foundation of Chinese interpersonal relationships, Chinese philosophy has often been conceived as humanistic and practical, as compared with the Western approach, which is seen to focus upon theoretical accounts of interpersonal relationship: "Chinese philosophy is generally most critically oriented to human existence as a whole and refuses to draw an absolute line of demarcation between theory and practice" (Cheng, 1987, p. 25). Perhaps it is this focus on interpersonal relationship that leads scholars to contend that Chinese are a "collective" people (Bond, Wan, Liung, & Giacalone, 1985; Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Hofstede, 1980), as contrasted with the Western "individualistic" approach. In collective societies, such as those of Chinese countries, the goal of achieving social harmony is held to take precedence over the individual. In terms of work performed, for example,

while the goals of individuals are more important in individualistic societies,

> In a collectivist society, people seek the satisfaction of a job well recognized. Students are less motivated by a need to master their subject and more by a desire to pass their examinations and acquire the status that a degree can provide. Preserving face—that is, preserving the respect from one's reference groups—is the collectivistic alternative to preserving self-respect in the individualistic cultures. Avoiding shame in the collectivistic society takes the place of avoiding guilt in the individualistic one. (Hofstede, 1984, p. 394)

In other words, the dichotomy between collectivism and individualism seems to suggest differences in the degree to which individuality is acknowledged. Chinese, having been labelled as a collectivistic people, are conceived of as a culture which aims at maintaining social harmony primarily by giving precedence to the goals of the ingroup over the individual. Furthermore, this broad categorization has led to the general conclusion that individualistic societies tend to utilize a direct, or explicit, form of communication, whereas the collective societies tend to utilize an indirect, or implicit, form of communication (Yum, 1988). This conclusion also finds a parallel in the distinctions between restricted and elaborated code (Bernstein, 1971), as well as between high- and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976). As Gudykunst and Kim (1984) put it, "When applied to cross-cultural comparisons, Bernstein's conceptualization of restricted and elaborated codes closely corresponds to Hall's (1976) notion of communication patterns in high-context and low-context cultures" (p. 138).

While these conceptions may be true within the confines of research grounded primarily in Western traditions, comparatively little attention has been paid in Western literature to in-depth explorations of Chinese interpersonal relationships and to the role of communication in Chinese relationships. There are a number of reasons for this comparative inattention. First, though common percepts have popularized the idea that Chinese are focused upon interpersonal relationships, few have asked how this principle is played out and interpreted by the Chinese themselves in their daily life. Second, in labelling Chinese society as "collective," few have asked what the term "collective" means to the Chinese. Third and finally, even if it is true that in Chinese societies, individuals must defer to the greater goal of "social harmony," few have investigated how in actuality the individual is treated in a Chinese society.

To address these issues and to get a closer look at the way Chinese conduct their daily lives, we argue that it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of how Chinese interpret the meaning of "interpersonal relations" and how this interpretation influences the way they conduct themselves and utilize communication in the social world. While there are many aspects of interpersonal relationship which could be discussed, in this paper we will focus upon the strategic element in Chinese interpersonal relationships and communication, through investigating the natives' interpretation of the concept of "relations" or "kuan-hsi" (關係).[1] By acquiring an understanding of kuan-hsi, we shall be able to re-evaluate the notion of Chinese society as "collective" and further enhance our understanding of the relation between culture and communication. Such an interpretation, however, requires more subtlety and depth; before we turn to a discussion of present-day Chinese interpretations of kuan-hsi and its implications for interpersonal communication, we will need to understand the influence of Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism, on Chinese interpersonal relationships.

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The Chinese Interpersonal World in Overview: The Confucian Ideal

While the importance of Confucianism to Chinese interpersonal relationships is generally acknowledged (Yum, 1988), the effect of Confucian *philosophy* regarding interpersonal relationships has proven difficult to explicate in terms sufficiently detailed to permit a full understanding of its implications. In this section we elaborate five basic ways in which Confucianism as a philosophy serves to define Chinese relationships: (1) family relations as the basis of society; (2) the extension of family relations; (3) likening-to-oneself as the norm of interacting; (4) human feeling as the emotional component of interacting; and (5) interacting with others as a spiritual lesson for individual development.

Family Relations as the Basis of Society

According to Confucian philosophy, society is possible and stable only when the five basic relationships are maintained: (1) father-son (the relation of *love*); (2) emperor-subject (the relation of *righteousness*); (3) husband-wife (the relation of *chaste conduct*); (4) elder-younger (the relation of *order*); and (5) friend-friend (the relation of *faithfulness*). Three out of these five bases of relations occur within the family (father-son, husband-wife, and elder-younger). They are the very basis of the human need for survival and are much easier to regulate than other social relationships (Keng, 1982). These basic relations within a family are denoted by the term *jen-lun* (人倫) in which "jen" refers to human beings whereas "lun" is the place and orders of activity for each individual in his basic interpersonal relationships" (Keng, 1982, p. 475). Since the family occupies a central role in Chinese society, the *jen-lun* between family members is particularly important for Chinese. In the family, as the common saying has it, the "father should be loving and children should be pious, the elder brother should be friendly and younger should be respectful." In other words, depending upon whether the relationship is close or distant, different ways of interacting—different *li,* in the parlance of Confucianism—should be employed for people of different orders of relationship (Fung, 1983).

The Extension of Family Relations

The regulating factors in family relationships are said to be extendable to the whole town, the whole society, and consequently, to the whole country—whatever the size community, one will know how to interact with others appropriately. To understand how this extension is achieved, one must attend to the role of marriage in Chinese society (Keng, 1982). As mentioned above, the family is the basis of society, and the relationship between husband and wife is the beginning of human relationship (*jen-lun*) (Keng, 1982). As the *Book of Changes (I Ching)* puts it, "The family is society in embryo; it is the native soil on which moral duty is made easy through natural affection, so that within a small circle a basis of moral practice is created, and this is later widened to include human relationships in general" (Wilhelm, 1981, p. 144).

Since the family serves as the basis of the society, one relates to the outside world in the same way one relates to the family members. Even if there is no blood connection or marriage relation, Chinese are still able to follow the rules of ordering between interactants. The common rule, based on the Confucian teachings is: if the other is older than twice of one's age, one must treat him like a father; if the other is older within ten years, one must treat him like one's elder brother; if the other is not older than five years, one can walk with him a minor distance to show respect. In other words, regardless of who one interacts with,

one must follow the rules of ordering (Keng, 1982). Thus, according to Confucius, the youngster must be filial toward his or her parents, while outside s/he must respect the elderly. As Chan (1963) puts it,

> The Five Relations have formed the general pattern of Chinese society. . . . It is often said that these do not include the stranger and the enemy. But to Confucianists, no one is unrelated, and therefore a stranger is inconceivable. He is at least related as older or younger. As to the enemy, there should never be such a person, for all people should be friends. (p. 70)

Starting from the family as a center, when everyone is able to accord to his or her own role and treat others with propriety, the whole society can be well-regulated according to gender, age, generation, and so on. While this complexity of behaviors is often seen to be imposed upon the individual by the external society, such norms are held by Confucian philosophy to reflect self-examination and development.

Likening-to-Oneself as the Norm of Interacting

Confucian philosophy holds that an individual's humanity lies in his or her relations to others. One of the basic virtues advocated in Confucianism is *shu* (恕) *"Shu* . . . [means] likening-to-oneself . . . using one's own person to measure. What you do not yourself desire, you ought not do to others, what you dislike in others reject in yourself, what you desire in others seek in yourself, this is likening-to-oneself" (Graham, 1989, p. 20). By cultivating *shu,* one encounters no resentment. On the other hand, one must perform one's own duty first before asking others to behave toward oneself in the appropriate manner. As the classic *Hsun-tzu* puts it,

> For the gentleman there are three sorts of likening-to-oneself.
>
> Being unable to serve your lord
> Yet expecting obedience from a servant
> is failure to liken-to-oneself.
>
> Being unable to give parents their due
> Yet expecting sons to be filial
> is failure to liken-to-oneself.
>
> Being unable to be respectful to an elder brother
> Yet expecting a younger to take orders from you
> is failure to liken-to-oneself.
>
> If a knight is clear about these three sorts of likening-to-oneself it will be possible for him to correct his person. (ibid)

This virtue can also be translated as reciprocity (Oliver, 1971) in guiding an individual's interaction with his or her fellows: one must not forget to return what one has been given, but must not ask for return of what one gives to others. This norm serves to substantiate the behaviors deemed appropriate to each individual who occupies a specific role. Interacting and building up relationships cannot be accomplished by only one individual. There must be mutual reacting toward one another. According to the Chinese view, in interacting with others, one must cultivate oneself first. Unless people are comfortable with the performance of their duty, they should not expect performance of duty from others. Chinese relationships, thus conceived, become a complex interplay between the interactants in which one must constantly infer proper rules of interacting from examining oneself first. This norm of reciprocity points to the importance of *internal* spiritual training of oneself before asking others, and challenges the account provided by most scholars that Chinese are constrained

heavily by their social and *external* rules without regard for individual freedom (see Chan, 1967).

Human Feeling as the Emotional Component of Interacting

"Likening-to-oneself," a measure to gauge the behavior of others and to formulate one's own behavioral responses, is closely connected to the concept of "human feeling." Indeed, given their basically humanistic orientation, Chinese have appropriated human feeling as the basis of their moral teachings. According to Huang (1988), "Human feeling is 'human beings' common emotional reaction" (p. 50). The classic *Li-Chi* has elaborated this concept thoroughly: "What are the feelings of men? They are joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, disliking, and liking. These seven feelings belong to men without their learning them." (Legge, 1967, p. 379) Those sensitive to human feeling know enough to infer others' feelings from their own experience. Consequently, one must be happy when others are happy; one must be sad when others are sad; and one must be willing to try one's best to help the other. For Chinese, interacting and building up interpersonal relationships does not imply following static behavioral prescriptions, but must also be attuned to human feeling. To allow human feeling to operate, it is important to know what people like and dislike and how one should behave. This element of human feeling paves the way for the distinction among people of different relationships, for it is natural for human feeling to differ between those of close relationship and those of distant relationship. Any interaction which is lacking in human feeling is subjected to severe criticism.

Interacting with Others as a Spiritual Lesson for Individual Development

Since the establishment of a society resides in each person's relations with others, and since one must constantly inspect oneself to formulate appropriate behavioral norms, individuals are burdened with the task of appropriate behavior, a process which leads to an elevation of their own interpersonal relationships. This burden is not simply a mundane task like the concept of "obligation of the citizen" but rather an inwardly elevated life experience. To learn to regulate one's proper relations with others, Confucius maintained that one must learn to practice the rules of *li* as defined by traditional wisdom (Chan, 1963; Graham, 1989). Indeed, the central virtue in Confucian philosophy is *jen* (仁), which denotes "all those moral qualities which should govern one man in his relations with another.... Briefly defined, it is the manifestation of the genuine nature, acting in accordance with propriety (*li*) and based upon sympathy for others" (Fung, 1983, p. 69). Individuals must learn not only to harmonize with their fellows but also with the universe (Graham, 1989). According to Confucian philosophy, as Tu (1985) argues, one's ability to achieve a harmonious relationship with others is the greatest *spiritual* accomplishment of one's life.

Methodology

With this brief introduction to Confucian ideas about interpersonal relationships, we now turn to an examination of how Chinese people choose to enact these lessons in their day-to-day lives. To do this, we have utilized an ethnographic and qualitative approach to interview data which focuses upon the subjective interpretation of the native's world view (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The samples analyzed in this paper are taken from data collected during May and June of 1990 in Taiwan as part of a research program focusing upon Chinese interpersonal

relationships and communication. In all, there are fifty-five interviews, audiotaped, ranging in length from forty-five minutes to over two hours (for this paper, excerpts taken from thirteen of these interviews are employed for the purpose of illustration). The subjects varied in age, occupation, social status, and educational background. It should also be noted that most of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, while others were conducted entirely in Taiwanese, and a few involved code-switching between the two languages. All quoted material was backtranslated with the help of Chinese graduate students. The questions concerning *kuan-hsi* comprised a part of the broader interview protocol; the questions relating specifically to *kuan-hsi* are included in Appendix A. Though the protocol was followed in all cases, each interview was also allowed to follow its own course.

The Concept of *Kuan-hsi:* More Than Relationship

The above outline of Confucianism presents a general picture of how, in an *ideal* sense, Chinese conduct their interpersonal relationships. This ideal must be put into practice, however; the manifestation of this picture in real social life is one of the most interesting and important aspects of Chinese culture. As we have seen, interpersonal relationships are one of the most important tasks confronting Chinese, not only for individual development but also for social harmony. Informed by the Confucian ideal and coupled with other traditional teachings, the Chinese have on the one hand appropriated different ways of interacting with people of different relationships to achieve social harmony, and on the other hand, have come to perceive people who share close relationships as somehow more special.

Thus, in putting Confucian theory, as well as other teachings, into practice, the Chinese have achieved another level of complexity in their relationships, that is, their *kuan-hsi*. On the more basic level of meaning, *kuan-hsi* is the literal translation of the word "relations." However, Chinese do not simply refer to *kuan-hsi* as "relations." The term *kuan-hsi* has taken on an additional semantic dimension through its usage in Chinese life. At a deeper and more subtle level, *kuan-hsi* refers to the manner in which Chinese strategically employ relations as a social resource. *Kuan-hsi* implies a special connection between people, a connection which brings along with it interactants' special rights and obligations, resulting from including the interactants as ingroup members. It is this second level of meaning which makes the issue about how Chinese conduct their interpersonal relationships especially significant and complicated.

This second level of meaning can be detected in some related linguistic expressions about *kuan-hsi*. For example, *kuan-hsi* is something which is considered as manipulable and changeable, hence verbs are attached in front of the noun *kuan-hsi*: "*la* (pull)-*kuan-hsi,*" "*kao* (manipulate)-*kuan-hsi,*" "*p'an* (climb)-*kuan-hsi,*" and so on. Moreover, there are a variety of descriptors denoting special connections, such as "*ti-li* (geographic) *kuan-hsi,*" "*t'ung-hsiang* (same town) *kuan-hsi,*" and so on. The diverse character of these linguistic expressions demonstrates the complexity of the concept of *kuan-hsi*.

To understand this complexity, it is necessary to draw the distinction between ingroup and outgroup in Chinese society. As elaborated above, different relationships imply different norms of interacting; the distinction between distant and close relationships is one of the most basic assumptions underlying the Confucian notion of human nature. This is what Fei (1947) referred to as "manners of different orders." Fei (1947) compares the evolution of one's interpersonal relations to a stone cast into the water which generates ripples moving outward from the center: the innermost ripples represent those closest to the social actor, with different degrees of the ripple effect representing different degrees of intimacy and obligation. Contrary to the arguments of the "collectivistic/individualistic" metaphor, Fei's

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analogy shows that the individual is the self-created *center* of an ever-expanding set of relationship "circles."

There are numerous examples of different orders of relationship in Chinese society. One is not expected to behave the same way toward one's own parents as one will toward one's friend. Similarly, one is not expected to behave the same way toward one's friend as one will toward strangers. This distinction allows clear lines to be drawn between *ingroup* and *outgroup* members. Huang (1988) points out that there are two major categories of Chinese interpersonal relationships: (1) the family, which focuses upon caring for each other and helping each other in times of need; and (2) outgroup members, which focus upon the rules of equity, disregarding human feeling. Huang's observation is similar to the view expressed by Eberhard (1971),

> To the Chinese the family means security and warmth, the outside world means insecurity and coldness. It is assumed that an outsider has no interest in others, no obligations and is most likely hostile because he pursues his and his family's interests. As the Chinese must suppress all aggressions within the family, the outer world is the field in which aggression finds its outlet. (p. 11)

The observation of the distinction between ingroup and outgroup members is confirmed by our interviewees, even though they differ among themselves regarding who counts as an ingroup member. When asked about whether they agreed with the common expression about the distinction between "one's own people" and "outgroup people," most stated that Chinese do make a clear distinction by employing a completely different set of rules for interaction. The issue thus becomes, not whether Chinese make this distinction, but rather *how* the distinction is made. As one interviewee, a 65-year-old male upper level manager, said,

> But the problem is how to define "one's own people." Everyone has different standards. Some may claim that "one's own people" are their relatives, first-level relatives, second-level, and third-level relatives. Some people may include close friends as part of "one's own people." Some may claim that good friends are the priority. My definition of "one's own people" includes direct relatives, siblings, my good friends, and even those whom I respect because of their morality, trustworthiness.

This distinction between ingroup and outgroup members serves as the fundamental rationale for *kuan-hsi*: if you have *kuan-hsi,* then you will be considered as another's "own people" and consequently, you will be treated differently from "outgroup people."

Kuan-hsi is one of the basic principles of cognition in guiding one's behavioral response, depending upon the "*kuan-hsi* distance" one has with another (Wen, 1988). It is out of this significant distinction about the treatment one receives by being a member of the ingroup or the outgroup that, when the need arises, Chinese must pay special attention to *kuan-hsi*. By allowing *kuan-hsi* to determine different behavioral responses, the Chinese feel particularly comfortable with, and are at the same time burdened with, obligations toward people of their own ingroup, since mutual support and help is most likely to occur when one is perceived as an ingroup member.

There are clearly two sides to this coin: the ingroup member will always be protected and benefit when it is possible and necessary, while the outgroup member may be rejected. On the other hand, ingroup members are obligated to help members of their own ingroup, while the outgroup members are allowed to act free of obligation. It is in this regard that Chinese relations are both warm-hearted and cold-blooded. One of our respondents illustrated this in a somewhat ironic way when asked to provide an example of *kuan-hsi,* the

respondent (a 35-year-old male middle level manager) remarked, "If not because of your sister introducing us, we would not be having this interview now!" This observation is warm to the extent that the respondent has accepted the interview, but cold to the extent that it would have been impossible for the interview to have been arranged through the expedient of a simple telephone call.

Chinese interpersonal relationships are not conducted simply according to a set of well-prescribed rules. Instead, the Chinese world of interpersonal relations is complicated by clear distinctions based on the closeness of a given relationship, and consequently, all requests for preferential treatment that arise out of one's special connections. We will argue that *kuan-hsi* is not simply relationship, it is *more than* relationship.

An Analysis of *Kuan-hsi*

In this section, we summarize the interviewees' accounts regarding the second level of meaning of *kuan-hsi* by attending to three different aspects of the concept: (1) ways to establish *kuan-hsi*; (2) how *kuan-hsi* is employed as social resource; and (3) how to maintain good *kuan-hsi*.

Ways to Establish Kuan-hsi

In order to become an ingroup member, the task that confronts Chinese is how to make the relation (*kuan-hsi*) as close as possible. According to Wen (1988), comparative strangers can be drawn closer to one's own person, from no relation to relatively close relation. Or, one may also choose to terminate a given relation, that is, to exclude someone from one's circle of ingroup members. Strategies employed to build up relationships are commonly described as "pull-*kuan-hsi*."

According to Wen's (1988) observation, "pull-*kuan-hsi*" is an effort to put oneself into an effective interpersonal connections network with people so as to achieve one's goals. To "pull" means to draw up interpersonal connections: if you do not have good connections, you try to make them; and if you already have a distant relationship, you try to make it close. The flexibility of Chinese interpersonal relations is clearly revealed by use of the verb "pull" (*la*, 拉). Indeed, the interviewees' replies seem to suggest that there are four ways that people employ to "pull-*kuan-hsi*": (1) by appealing to relative relations; (2) by pointing toward some previous association; (3) by going through one's ingroup members; and (4) by interacting with others to establish "personal relationships."

Relative relationships. The first type of strategy to "pull-*kuan-hsi*" is by appealing to blood or marriage relations. One can claim to be a member of an ingroup by claiming, "we are relatives." Even if the "relative relation" is quite distant, one can still enjoy a certain degree of special treatment. Consequently, one cannot refuse a request from the other, lest one be seen as lacking human feeling. The truth of this principle is expressed humorously in the classical Chinese saying, "When a person acquires the Way (*Tao*), all his chickens and dogs are elevated to Heaven."

Of course, blood relationship is already established and cannot be denied. However, it is only when one *claims* the relation that one is able to make the distant connection close. Sometimes, however, ingroup members are burdened with people who claim to "have blood relations." One interviewee, a 37-year-old single female accountant, recalls an unfortunate instance in which her uncle borrowed money from her parents:

> According to my observation of my parents' generation, relatives are even worse than friends. . . . You can argue with your friends, so I think relatives are much

worse because there is always additional pressure: "let's don't count so much, we are siblings." And your money is gone.

He is not poor; he goes traveling every year. But if he refuses to return the money to you, you have no way to deal with him. If you ask him, he will tell you his difficulty again with tears. And you cannot do anything with it; nothing is solved, but they pretend it is. Because of the "*kuan-hsi*," you cannot do anything with it. . . . You will not sue this person because he is still a member of your own family. You won't get more by suing him, especially if he doesn't have any money.

You can only wait for sometime when he "discovers his own consciousness," and then you will feel like you happen to find some money on the road.

By appealing to his status as an ingroup member, the interviewee's uncle finds a way to avoid his financial obligation.

Previous association. A second way of establishing *kuan-hsi* is by pointing toward some previous association. For example, during an initial interaction, one is able to detect the other person's background, learning the other's hometown, education, experience, and so on, in order to discover some similarities so as to establish *kuan-hsi* with the other (Huang, 1988).

One primary basis upon which to build the feeling of association is through emphasizing that the two people are from the same *geographic* location, as expressed in the common Chinese term, "*ti-li* (geographically-connected) *kuan-hsi*." As Fei (1947) argues in his observation of mainland Chinese, such behavior points out the "earthy nature" of Chinese tradition: most Chinese, for most of the time, tend to stay in the same place. Consequently, geographical location becomes something meaningful to Chinese. This trait is also to be seen in present-day Taiwan. People who come from the same town are considered to be special, and one's relationships with such people are much closer than those with pure chance acquaintances. This attitude is reflected in the commonly-used utterance, "we are from the *same town*." Interestingly, pointing out the fact that one resides in the same town is frequently persuasive enough to let one's target person feel something special about oneself. A vivid example of how the "same town *kuan-hsi*" operates is provided by another interviewee, a 45-year-old male lawyer:

I know a labor union . . . a relatively autonomous new union which is against the old labor union. . . . I found that from the beginning, the new clique does not exert much power to fight against the old one. Later I realized that they [the leader of the old one and the manager of the new one] come from the same town, and have the "same town" relations, very good personal relations.

This influences the development of the new labor union. The old labor union, by employing this relation, keeps the new one on its side. Otherwise, according to the goal of the new labor union, they should fight against the old one instead of standing on the same side. But perhaps the "same town" relation gives them . . . human feeling. They have a very good impression about the leader of the old union; they don't think about what is meant by the old power. They only consider themselves as good friends: [they think] everyone else in the old power is very corrupt, but not this person. Of course this is not true.

A second commonly used means to indicate association is shown in the phrase, "we are from the *same school*." By attending the same school, one is allowed to address another at approximately the same level as an elder brother or sister might associate with his/her younger brother or sister. Simply by having attended the same school, one is able to mark the relationship as more or less special; the other is no longer a "stranger." One example of this practice was provided by one interviewee (a 65-year-old housewife): "I have a friend

who likes to climb *kuan-hsi* with others. One day we were at a meeting of an alumni association. She tried to climb *kuan-hsi* with a governor's wife by telling her that they were from the same high school. [My friend] said, 'Oh, you went to school two years earlier than me. I should call you my former generation!" However, the governor's wife, apparently refusing to acknowledge this attempt to "pull-*kuan-hsi*," denied the connection, asserting that she transferred to a different school. Ironically, the interviewee criticized the governor's wife, asserting that it was *her* behavior that showed a lack of human feeling.

Some might object that this is a natural tendency of human beings: by having some similar life experience, that is, by living in the same place or attending the same school, one naturally has more to share with the other. But Chinese have utilized these previous associations to a degree unknown in the West. For some Chinese, it is not a problem of whether one naturally feels more close to the other by having had some previous association or common experience. Rather, it is the constraining effect of this association on the interpersonal relationship that makes the burden of association inescapable. If one chooses not to grant any special feeling or treatment to such associates, one may be blamed for "lacking human feeling." Such relationships, while they may be warm in many other ways, may often in fact easily fall prey to manipulation and abuse.

Going through intermediaries. A third way to establish *kuan-hsi* is to make connection through others who already have some kind of *kuan-hsi* with the target person. For example, one may claim that "I am your friend's friend," "I am your father's best friend," or "I am your daughter's husband's sister," to assume a perhaps superficial closeness. This kind of connection can be extended to increasingly distant persons, until the target person refuses to accept the obligations implied by such an association.

While a request made directly by a person who has no *kuan-hsi* at all with the target person may fail, when the request is presented by an ingroup member, it is much more likely to be granted, unless the relation is considered to be too distant. Since the third-party intermediary is in the same ingroup as the target, the target person usually finds it hard to refuse the request, even though the beneficiary may remain unknown to the target. One of our interviewees, a 30-year-old male physician, provides an amusingly complicated example of this process: "Person A's maid's mother is hospitalized in hospital X where A's aunt's son works. Person A's maid asks A to secure a favor for her mother by asking A's aunt to tell her son to tell his colleague to pay special attention to A's maid's mother." Unfortunately, since the connection was too distant, A's aunt's son refused to grant the request made by A's maid's mother, though it is quite possible that refusing such a request may have run him the risk of being criticizd as "lacking human feeling."

Establishing interaction with another. The fourth and final approach to establishing *kuan-hsi* is through interaction with the target person. One of our interviewees (the 45-year-old male lawyer quoted previously) pointed out that "one must frequently interact and develop relations with those who have potential to become your customers. For example, if you want to develop a circle of business acquaintances, you need to join their life circles, such as club and society." Another interviewee, the 60-year-old male upper manager quoted earlier, concurred: "If the target person likes fishing, you then go fishing with him. If the target person likes to play golf, then you accompany him to play golf." For this interviewee, to join similar activities (such as business societies like "Lions Club" or the "Rotary Club") is to "break into" the circle of influential people so as to get "insider" information, a major task confronting management. Later the manager elaborated this idea:

> "Climbing" *kuan-hsi* has many ways. . . . When you have arrived at a certain level
> of managers, besides having to have very good ability to manage your subordinates,
> and ability to design, it is very important that you get important insiders'

information. If you do not have enough, correct, sufficient, and good information, you cannot make a good design.

So you need to break in the circle of those influential people. There are many ways. It depends upon your friends, your family, and your hobby. [On the other hand] . . . for those who pay attention to this issue, they will also use these channels to get close to you, from their friends, and their family. Some people bring gifts to you. Some people who are more high class, who are smarter, they will use, for example, playing golf. You play golf and I play too; we have similar hobbies. Or drinking "old man's tea." If you say you like to drink tea, they will say, "I have some good tea, would you like to try it. . . ?" These are all ways of "pulling" *kuan-hsi.*

By creating chances of interaction and by sharing interests with one another, one is able to establish some kind of special relationship with the target person (at least "we fish together"). This final approach is one of the most common ways to do business in the industrial world in Taiwan. As one interviewee, a 35-year-old female secretary, observed, "There are many male managers who follow the boss everywhere. When they have any social activity, they will never fail to invite the boss to come with them. When the boss supervises the workers' performance, they will explain everything for the boss."

In fact, regardless of who the target is, underlying these different approaches toward establishing *kuan-hsi* is the ability to communicate skillfully in the presence of the target person. One interviewee, a 36-year-old female upper-level manager, provides a very thorough analysis, comparing behavior and effect of those who are good at establishing *kuan-hsi* and those who are not:

Those who are able to "do *kuan-hsi*" are very different from those who are not good at "doing *kuan-hsi*" in their performances in their groups. Suppose there is someone who is good at "doing *kuan-hsi*," and one who is not good, and they meet a person who they believe that, if they can establish contact with this person, it will help them a lot. The one who is good [at *kuan-hsi*] will look for all different kinds of reasons and topics to communicate and talk with this important person. In the group, he may also present a lot of "matching" behavior, etc., and actively let that person notice him and discover his personality and thought.

The other one who is not very good at "doing *kuan-hsi*" may just leave it that way without actively getting in touch with this [important] person, or expressing himself. The effects are very different. The degree of closeness is very different, whether you contact that person or not. When you need help from this person, or when you want to "match" him, the degree of closeness and *kuan-hsi* make a great difference. . . . But if it is a one-sided help recruitment, the difference is very large. If you do not have *kuan-hsi,* just opening your mouth is very difficult.

Through talking skillfully, one is able to establish a good relationship for future use. To build up a good interpersonal relationship, Wen (1988) argues, some complementary behaviors are necessary: one must control one's own temper, build up "good" interpersonal relationships, and avoid being unduly influenced by others. Like American businesspeople who "network," Chinese use "kao (do)-*kuan-hsi*" to manipulate their interpersonal relations to achieve their goals, to fashion their personal "*kuan-hsi* network." This kind of *kuan-hsi* network is to be utilized as a social resource.

Employing Kuan-hsi as a Social Resource

As in many societies, for Chinese, successful interpersonal relationships are necessary for one to be successful in society. As one interviewee, a 28-year-old male personnel officer,

argued, "One needs to think clearly about one's own job and career so as to decide what kind of interpersonal relations will be 'most helpful.' " By being able to establish a good *kuan-hsi*, the person will be greatly helped in the future should the need arise. According to interviewee accounts, there are several ways in which *kuan-hsi* could be employed as a social resource: (1) in getting more clients for one's business; (2) in helping one's career; (3) in solving conflicts; and (4) in making life easier.

Getting more clients. Even though "pulling *kuan-hsi*" may seem to be manipulative, such actions are in fact quite common ways of dealing with others in the business sector, ways which may also give Chinese a sense of human feeling. One 30-year-old male dentist told us, ". . . most of my clients are introduced by my original clients. They come like a net. They only believe those people who introduced me to them. Maintaining a good *kuan-hsi* with your clients is a guarantee of getting more clients." Thus, the clients do not simply function as consumers; instead, they share personal relations with both the dentist and those whom they tell about the dentist.

Another interviewee, the 45-year-old male lawyer (quoted above), talks about a different aspect of the *"kuan-hsi* net": "You need to make connection with those powerful or more resourceful groups so as to get more cases," and that, "if you do not 'climb *kuan-hsi*,' you will probably remain as a middle-level lawyer, you will not have very many cases. If you are good at climbing *kuan-hsi*, you will get a lot of cases."

Solving conflict. The connection made through powerful people seems to be a common phenomenon in the Chinese world. Such influential persons not only serve to attract new clients, they can also serve to mediate some dispute or conflict. The 45-year-old male lawyer offers an example to explain how a labor-management dispute was resolved by the use of an intermediary's *kuan-hsi*:

> When laborers have disputes with their boss, usually the boss has more channels to talk about human feeling. . . . Although laborers and those who want to help them have relatively great power, the boss has even greater "interpersonal relations." He can ask laborers to consider human feeling for him. . .
>
> If the laborers ask for ten dollars, for example, the boss will go through a lot of "*kuan-hsi*" to tell the laborers, "You should give [your] boss some 'face.' Five dollars are enough." Normally the laborers need to back away, because they have a "burden of human feeling". . . . The boss will "go through" those powerful and influential people . . . to talk to the lawyer or the labor union. Then they encounter the "burden of human feeling."
>
> These lawyers or the labor union cannot insist against the boss any longer; they will accept some compromise by telling those laborers that "The boss has sincerity. You don't need to ask for ten dollars. Five dollars are okay."

Similarly, another interviewee, a successful businessman (the 60-year-old upper level manager quoted earlier) who often becomes a target for those who want to establish *kuan-hsi*, frankly admits that he also needs to employ a lot of *kuan-hsi* to get his job done. He provides a detailed account of the complexity involved in employing *kuan-hsi* to solve the problem:

> For example, if I need to solve problems for my subordinates. Suppose some clients are not satisfied with my subordinates. How can I not "go out the door" to help my subordinates solve the problem? When I need to solve the problem I must go visit [the dissatisfied client], or he may already have called to express his anger. First I need to know, who is he? Where is he? Who is his father? Who is his wife? What does he like? Who are his friends? What is his hobby? If I must face him, I at least can "climb" this *kuan-hsi* to cultivate with him a sense of sameness, let him feel

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close about me. He may be dissatisfied about our company, about my subordinates, or about my superiors.

When you go to visit him, of course you still need to be very polite. At least you need to invite him to drink some tea. Bring some good tea with you and say, "I know that you like to drink tea, why don't you try this?" Half of his anger will go away. If you are acquainted with his wife, or his friend is your friend, just tell your friend, "Please tell him that I am going to visit him. Please say some good words for me."

Helping one's career. To see some further examples of how *kuan-hsi* is employed in real life, let us examine several interviewees' comments. The first example is provided by a 40-year-old male middle manager, who claimed that one may want to hire one's previous teacher, if that person is retired and remains influential, to be a company consultant, so as to make use of the teacher's interpersonal resources. Moreover, he continues,

> Suppose you want to have a good relation with the bank. Sometimes you may have "relative relations" with some important figures in the Bank. If you don't have "relative relations," you need to have some kind of "colleague relations" from the earlier days. These "colleague relations" must have some special interest involved. So "climbing *kuan-hsi*" is always a way of "interest taking and giving."

A second example of how previous association serves as a social resource was provided by another of our interviewees, the 45-year-old lawyer from whom we have quoted several times: "In criminal cases when the judge has some freedom to decide upon the sentence, if the judge and the lawyer were classmates before, then they have 'friend *kuan-hsi*' [and] the judge is likely to make the case easier for the lawyer, which is perfectly legal." Since human feeling is the basis of Chinese interpersonal relationships, the judge in this example is allowed to consider human feeling in rendering a judgment on the case, while maintaining judicial impartiality.

Making life easier. According to the interviewees' account, if one's *kuan-hsi* is quite good (i.e., if one has good connections with some important people), people in general will "give you face" and not reject your request. In this regard, we can see how *kuan-hsi* is employed within and beyond itself. Even if you do not make special effort to get *kuan-hsi*, your good *kuan-hsi* can help you in some aspects of your life. For example, one interviewee, a 40-year-old female middle manager, contends, "If you are a man of good *kuan-hsi* and need to do something, just give people a call and they will do everything for you." Another interviewee, the 37-year-old female accountant quoted previously, points out that in her company, there are people who get their jobs because of their *kuan-hsi*. Still another, a 35-year-old female music teacher, observes that there are some teachers who teach in her school because they are "some important figure's husband or wife." The interviewees in general disagree with this kind of practice and complain that these people, often not really qualified for their jobs, sometimes bring trouble to the organization; their strategies for coping with such people is to distance themselves from them.

However, some respondents are more optimistic. For these respondents, *kuan-hsi* as a social resource can only function to a certain degree, whereas ability remains the most important arbiter of success. As one interviewee puts it,

> According to my observation, if you have *kuan-hsi* you can climb up much faster. But after a certain stage, on the highest level, you still need to be backed up by your ability. Otherwise you cannot do it. *Kuan-hsi* only helps to a certain extent; it cannot help you completely, unless the company is owned by your family. For

normal business enterprises, you must back up yourself with your ability, otherwise you will be fired if people are not convinced by you.

Another upper-level female manager (quoted above) contends that "climbing *kuan-hsi*" is relatively infrequent in the present-day Taiwanese business community: "Our company does not have the custom of sending gifts to 'climb *kuan-hsi*.' " She continues, "Unless you do not think it is very important to do your job, you cannot just make decisions according to your own personal preference. If you work hard, whether you have *kuan-hsi* or not and whether you like that person or not, becomes less important. What you need to consider is how to assign a job to the most appropriate person." For this interviewee, *kuan-hsi* comes to play a role only "when people are of equal capability then you will have some kind of preference."

Thus, for Chinese, the concept of *kuan-hsi* does not refer simply to relations. Instead, the notion of relations is extended to include an aspect of *instrumentality*. By considering this practical aspect, we can see that relations can be employed to achieve one's goals, and consequently, whether one has power to help another becomes a major concern for establishing or employing a particular kind of *kuan-hsi*. The relation between power and *kuan-hsi* becomes reciprocal: the more power one has, the more complicated and extended one's *kuan-hsi* becomes; on the other hand, the better one's *kuan-hsi* becomes, the more power he or she can claim. Therefore, in one's social life, one can try to expand one's own power and interpersonal relationships, so that others are less likely to refuse any of one's requests and thus one is more likely to be successful in the society (Huang, 1988).

Maintaining a Good Kuan-hsi

According to Yang (1988), maintaining social harmony is a major task for Chinese. Chinese have developed a great variety of verbal strategies, such as compliments, greeting rituals, and so on, to maintain social harmony and good interpersonal relations. This focus on social harmony may also explain why Chinese prefer to say something good in front of others (Yang, 1988). One of our interviewees, the 40-year-old male middle-level manager quoted previously, concurred with this observation: "To employ *kuan-hsi* you must have some good methods. You need to know the *weakness* of human nature: people like to listen to good words and dislike listening to bad words." Another respondent, the 37-year-old female accountant, speaks to the importance of "keeping a smiling face":

> First, your facial expression is very important. If you are unhappy, at least you still need to keep some kind of smile. I always admire people who, just having finished fighting with others, and you see a smiling face when they turn their head. It is especially important for managers in a company, you cannot still keep an angry face even ten minutes after you scold or fight with people. Otherwise they will feel that you are very difficult to get along with. . . . To keep a smiling face is in accord to the traditional saying, "Raise your hand and you will not hit the smiling people." Even if you are still very angry inside, if you keep a smiling face, people will not be against you.

Thus, to be able to conduct oneself smoothly in front of others at a somewhat superficial level is the first step needed in maintaining a "good *kuan-hsi*." Although this is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition.

Kuan-hsi is built upon and extended by the concept of human feeling. As elaborated earlier, the concept functions as a social norm which regulates the harmonious relationship between one and another. That is, different orders of interacting based upon different relationships should be seen as a reflection of human nature or human feeling.

While traditional values strongly emphasize the ethical dimension of social interaction, the employment of human feeling may sometimes be distorted. According to Huang (1988), "For Chinese, the emphasis on human feeling is limited only to those with whom one has *kuan-hsi*" (p. 48). Once such *kuan-hsi* is established it can become strong exclusive of others (Wen, 1988). The exclusiveness of human feeling is closely tied to the concept of "reciprocity" and the integration of both produce a modern Chinese interpretation of human feeling as "social resource:"

> . . . Human feeling refers to the resources which people exchange with one another. When others are happy, I can give them gifts to celebrate; when others are in need, I give them material support. This is the favor I do to others, "doing human feeling debt." Those who accept my help or my gift "owe" my human feeling. Therefore, the concept of human feeling refers to a social resource for exchange. The difference between this type of exchange and other types of exchange is that it is very difficult to calculate precisely. . . . When we give human feeling to those inside our own system of social connections, we are not quite sure when and what the other will return to us. There is a significant degree of uncertainty in calculating the "human feeing debt." (Huang, 1988, p. 50)

By maintaining a proper balance of the resources exchanged, one is able to maintain a good *kuan-hsi:*

> ". . . One must by all means maintain a give-and-take relationship with other members within the '*kuan-hsi* net.' . . . [as in the common saying] 'Have give and have take, there is never a cold situation.' When one meets another, one must give greetings, [express] concern, send regard and be humble, to express one's own concern for another. That is why Chinese say 'to see each other we have three points of feeling' and 'Too much gift is never to be blamed.' " (Huang, 1988, pp. 50-51).

Those Chinese who are interested in employing *kuan-hsi* as a social resource are thus conscious of maintaining a constantly monitored balance sheet in terms of mutual rights and obligations so that one will be happily welcomed as an ingroup member as long as the *kuan-hsi* is well maintained and negotiated.

Another aspect of maintaining a good *kuan-hsi* could be examined from the perspective of persons who are targets of requests. As elaborated earlier, those who have good *kuan-hsi* often become targets with whom to establish *kuan-hsi*. It is interesting to see how those influential people behave toward others' attempts to build *kuan-hsi* with them. While some interviewees consider this task relatively burdensome, others maintain that these attempts to build up *kuan-hsi* also help them to maintain good interpersonal relations. One interviewee, the previously-quoted 60-year-old male upper manager, suggested an open-minded attitude toward those who try to "climb high," because, (1) these people may, in turn, become one's future resource, and (2) one can avoid offending them through being criticized as "lacking human feeling," As this respondent noted,

> The question is whether human beings are social animals. You must develop interpersonal relationships. The reason why some people are called "public figures" is because they have better interpersonal relationships. Many people know about them so they can be elected. People cannot be isolated from other people; if so, you may need to go up to some mountain and stay there by yourself. When people want to "climb *kuan-hsi*" with you, you need to be very open-hearted and accept them with good will; don't just consider they are "bad people." You need to know their purpose. Some people may be able to work together, some may

become deep friends, some may become mere acquaintances. So you still need to accept them. If you just reject them, it will be a minus for you. Sometimes if you don't accept them, you might offend them: people will fault you for being too arrogant.

The degree to which accepting those who attempt to "climb *kuan-hsi*" can function as a social resource is also dependent upon who the target person is and what kind of position he or she occupies. If s/he is a business person, an excellent "public *kuan-hsi*" is not really that important. But if the target is a public figure, then maintaining a good *kuan-hsi* becomes extremely important. One may even need to hire "specialists" to deal with "climbing *kuan-hsi*," a rough analogue to the role of the public relations specialist in Western countries. As one interviewee, the 28-year-old male personnel officer, observed, "Especially if you are a very top person, such as a [governmental] representative, you will need many secretaries to handle this. They are public figures, they must behave like this." Whether to accept an attempt to build up *kuan-hsi* implies different degrees of benefits and costs, which must be carefully weighed by public figures.

From the above analysis, it should be clear that to maintain a good *kuan-hsi*, one not only needs to pay attention to social harmony by interacting with people smoothly at a superficial level, and to keep a balanced resource exchange sheet, but also not to refuse others' attempts at climbing *kuan-hsi*. However, we must also note that although *kuan-hsi* is very important, sometimes it is difficult to maintain a good *kuan-hsi* because people in the *kuan-hsi* "net" may not share the same political status, fortune, social fame, age, and so forth. Consequently, superficial social harmony, norm of reciprocity, and an open-minded attitude to accept others may become problematic. To put it simply, it is difficult to "climb high" (i.e., go beyond one's own position in the society) (Wen, 1988).

The Role of Communication in *Kuan-hsi*

In discussing this instrumental aspect of interpersonal relations, we can clearly see the role communication plays in the realm of *kuan-hsi*. First, communicative performances differ according to whether the communicator is a member of an ingroup or outgroup, ingroup members being allowed to engage in freer and deeper talk. According to Wen (1988),

> Chinese are very sensitive to *kuan-hsi*. Whether to tell truth, to support, or to help the other tends to depend upon whether one has *kuan-hsi* with the other. A common saying states, "When you meet a person, only speak 30 percent, do not tell all in your heart," referring to the depth of *kuan-hsi*. Deeper *kuan-hsi* persons are allowed to talk deeper, and more shallow *kuan-hsi* persons, on the other hand, can only talk about something not serious, such as greetings. (p. 32)

Second, communication can be utilized as a skill to establish *kuan-hsi* with others. There are many ways of communication which will aid in the establishment of *kuan-hsi*. One way is to employ verbal strategies to determine whether the target person shares some commonality with the communicator, whether they "come from the same school" or "come from the same town." Another way to utilize communicative strategy to establish *kuan-hsi* is to initiate and to maintain smooth social intercourse. For example, communicators must restrain their anger and know what others like so as to frame one's talk accordingly. In other words, to establish good *kuan-hsi*, the communicator must be able to find out commonalities quickly and formulate his/her communication accordingly.

Third, it should be noted that such verbal skills, which serve a pragmatic goal, are

employed in dealing with *pure instrumental relations.* For Chinese, it is only when one is interested in employing the relationships as a social resource that the issue of communicative skills becomes particularly important. For most of the interviewees, communicative skill is not the primary concern in dealing with others in their daily lives, chiefly for two reasons. First, there are many kinds of relationships and many different ways of enacting interpersonal dynamics. Most of these do not concern the instrumental aspect at all. When relationships are not consciously employed as a social resource, sincerity is the rule of thumb in communicating with others.

A second reason for lack of concern with communication skills is that, for these interviewees, establishing good *kuan-hsi* is reserved only for ambitious people. In fact, many interviewees said that they occupy only minor positions in their companies. Therefore, it really makes no difference whether one's *kuan-hsi* is good or not. One interviewee contended that he would pay more attention to this issue should he become elected or appointed to some important office. Interestingly, many interviewees, while attributing ambitious people's success in the society partly to their verbal skills, nevertheless express their disgust for people who employ an ingratiating demeanor to establish *kuan-hsi.* This strategic manipulation of verbal skills in interpersonal relationship is apparently contrary to Confucius' teaching. It is no surprise to find that though most of the interviewees consider speaking skill as important in the modern society, although they would not spend extra time and effort in learning to speak.

A fourth important aspect of the role of communication in *kuan-hsi* concerns the unique problems associated with communicating through an intermediary. While most studies have pointed out the pervasiveness of indirectness as the dominant Eastern mode of communication, Chinese have fashioned their own ways of "going through another." This strategy is definitely more useful: on the one hand, the target person finds it difficult to refuse a request, while on the other hand, the risk of losing face is reduced to a minimum because the initiator and the target do not confront one another directly. Chinese communication is much less laden with direct confrontation and impression management. Under the protection of *kuan-hsi,* communication is guided and mediated by the relationship rather than having the relationships guided by the content of communication. Here, we can see a complex interplay between relationship and communication: beyond the common dichotomy of direct and indirect forms of communication, we should note that there are many more ways of conveying one's message.

Fifth and finally, the strategic nature of maintaining a good *kuan-hsi* from a communicative perspective suggests the possibility of co-existence of *social positioning* and *message elaboration.* The present study refutes the general tendency to classify a "collective" culture as employing a "restricted code," one which is often seen as cognitively underdeveloped. From the functional view of communication, in fact, Chinese have elaborated in detail ways of communicating to people of different positions, through a set of ready vocabularies. The concern for social relationships serves as a guide for formulating the *best* verbal messages, and does not imply that one is unable to construct the message by being constrained by the social position one has occupied. The "restricted" content of the message toward people of different positions is in fact an "elaborated" code: Chinese are able to elaborate their verbal messages while at the same time paying attention to the social position of the target person. As we have seen, the contents of communication for one's friend is different from the contents employed for one's friend's friend, which in turn is different from the situation in which a person has never been introduced by one's friend. In other words, by being "restricted" within the range of social positioning, the task of elaborating one's message is in

fact *more* cognitively demanding. One cannot just elaborate the message; one needs to pay attention to the degree of relationships.

Re-Thinking the Role of Culture in Communication

From the above analysis, it is clear that when we focus upon the instrumental aspect of relationships of Chinese people, we see how communication can be employed as an instrument for practical ends. While this view is not far from the Western conception, the contents of the view are vastly different. In examining interpersonal relationships and the role of communication in relationships between Chinese and Western approaches, we can note the following important areas of difference: (1) the role of the individual in interpersonal relationships; (2) the distinction between distant and close relationships; and (3) the strategic nature of communication and relationships. Considering these differences leads to significant conclusions about the role that culture plays in orchestrating communicative performances in one's interpersonal life.

The role of individual in interpersonal relationships. While most Western studies on interpersonal relationships tend to ascribe voluntary motivations to the interactants, the present study clearly demonstrates that establishing relationships may not be simply an individuated enterprise. While American culture life treats the individual as the center of attention in building upon interpersonal relationships, more often than not, the Chinese cultural pattern of relationships is built upon *other relationships*. Interpersonal bonding, from this point of view, is not due solely to "honest communication," but has its basis in bonding that is already established and ongoing. According to the Chinese perspective, the role of communication is certainly important, as least to the extent of serving as a tool to establish a given relationship, but it is not the dominant force in bringing the relationship into existence.

The strategic nature of communication in establishing relationships. For the Chinese, communication can be perceived as a utilitarian tool mainly in the case of obtaining profit and succeeding in society. In other words, the strategic view of communication for individuals is limited to the pursuit of mundane success. Chinese seem to employ a different set of norms for interaction: when people are of close relation, they do not talk about "communication strategies," but when people become critically important for one's survival in the society, "communicative strategies" become highly valued. Moreover, even if people employ communication to achieve personal success, in general, speaking skill is still considered to be immoral. This stands in sharp contrast to the Western analytic, value-neutral, view of interpersonal relations, in which strategic motivation is said to permeate every aspect of one's daily life, including both distant and close relationships (see, for example, Miller & Steinberg, 1975).

The distinction between distant and close relationships. Chinese relationships, when employed as a social resource, are noticeably dynamic. There always exists the possibility of a sudden fusion of distant and close relations. Moreover, the establishing of *kuan-hsi* need not require "real, supportive, sincere" forms of communication. In other words, in the Western approach, communication is seen as a well-prescribed routine which distinguishes between superficial talk associated with distant relationships, and a more "genuine" communication associated with close relationships. However, from the Chinese perspective, neither close nor distant relationships are easily distinguished simply by the forms and content of communication, which are frequently seen as superficial. Even if the content of communication does not "penetrate into" the other's psyche, it is still quite possible to establish a close relation.

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Conclusions

While the management of interpersonal relationships is equally important to members of other cultures (for example, to public relations specialists in the United States), the fact that Chinese are *ready* to talk about, and are relatively conscious of, the role of interpersonal relations in their social and personal worlds, reveals the significance and importance of relationships in Chinese cultural life. Interpersonal relations, then, can be seen as one of the very bases of Chinese social fabric—culture and relations are connected, weaving in and among one another, endlessly shifting within webs of Chinese "interpersonal relations."

It is interesting to note that while many researchers choose to describe Chinese society as socially oriented (i.e., emphasizing social harmony at the price of individuality), ironically, according to the interviewees' accounts, social harmony is in fact a *means through which to achieve the individual's goals*. The focus of attention in the practical aspect of interpersonal relations of the Chinese is, in fact, the individual.

As elaborated above, to inquire into the depth of Chinese cultural life requires that one be able understand how Chinese choose to interpret the meaning of, and conduct themselves in, the realm of interpersonal relationships and communication. It is by way of this understanding that we are allowed to probe beyond several commonly held perceptions: that Chinese society is simply "collective;" that the individual's rights in Chinese society are less important than the goal of social harmony; and that Chinese use "indirect" forms of communication. While any attempt made by scholarly research can and must only focus upon one specific aspect of the phenomenon in question, we believe that by letting Chinese talk about their interpersonal relationships, they define what their society looks like, instead of having it defined for them.

The fact that Chinese interpersonal relations exhibit "different orders of relating" is not only applicable to an individual's personal life, it also serves to regulate the society as a whole. Starting from the individual as a center for building up interpersonal relations, this fluctuating web of interpersonal connections is further extended to the family, societal, and, finally to the national level. While Confucius' teachings on norms of interpersonal relationship remain influential in Chinese culture, the Chinese have appropriated these norms in their own ways by establishing their own traditions. It is in this context that we have been able to re-evaluate the role of communication in Chinese cultural life.

NOTE

[1]All transliterations of the Chinese language into English are according to the Wade-Giles system (Choy, 1981).

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Appendix A

Segment of Overall Interview Protocol Dealing with Kuan-hsi

The concept of "*kuan-hsi*":

a. What is the nature of "*kuan-hsi*"? How does one define this concept, and concepts such as "pull-*kuan-hsi*" and "family *kuan-hsi*"?

b. Who do you think you have "*kuan-hsi*" with? Why? Is this "*kuan-hsi*" transferable or is it fixed (extendable, for example, to a friend's friend)?

c. What are the rules for maintaining "good *kuan-hsi*"? If you want to build up a good relationship with your superior, what kinds of communicative performances would you engage in? Have you ever brought a gift to some VIP in order to get certain favor? Are you proud of "having good *kuan-hsi* with someone"?

d. How does communication vary as a function of different "*kuan-hsi*"? Can new *kuan-hsi* be brought into existence by communication? What are other alternative ways that help build up *kuan-hsi*? Would you flatter someone in order to make a good impression on that person?

e. Does *kuan-hsi* make a difference according to in-group and out-group members? Would you consider yourself as having "good *kuan-hsi*" for being in a rich family?

f. Can *kuan-hsi* be built up only for people of similar social status? What do we mean by "climbing high"?

g. How does interpersonal relationship function as a tool for the self's success in society? Have you ever been jealous of someone who gets promoted out of that person's *kuan-hsi* with some VIP? How do you feel about the common saying, "no tolerance of small matters will destroy the big event"?

h. To what extent does interpersonal relationship in a Chinese society determine whether you will succeed or not? Do you agree that if you work hard, you will get whatever you want?