

Guanxi and Mientze: Conflict Resolution in Chinese Society

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop a theoretical framework for illustrating the conflict resolution models in Chinese society on the basis of author's previous analysis of Chinese cultural heritage. In my book "Knowledge and Action," I analyzed the structure of Confucianism with a reference to my theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game." According to my analysis of Confucian ethics for ordinary people, interpersonal relationships in Chinese society are classified into three categories: vertical in-group, horizontal in-group, horizontal out-group. When an individual is in conflict with another in one of these three groups, the conflict resolution models may be further classified into 12 categories according to four aspects of consideration, namely whether s/he wants to maintain interpersonal harmony, whether s/he insists on attaining a personal goal, the interactants' ways of coordination, and what is the dominant response. The author believes that this model can be viewed as a general framework for understanding Chinese social behaviors.

This article proposes a conceptual framework to illuminate the conflict resolution in Chinese society on the basis of the author's previous works on analyzing Chinese cultural heritage. In my paper "Face and favor: Chinese power game" (Hwang, 1987), I developed a theoretical model for explaining Chinese social interaction on the basis of symbolic interactionism and social exchange theory; In my book "Knowledge and Action" (Hwang, 1995), I utilize this model as a scheme for analyzing Chinese cultural tradition including Confucianism, Legalism, and Martial School by the method of structuralism. I believe that the Confucian ethics for ordinary people as described in my book "Knowledge and Action" is an archetype of Chinese social action which can be used to understand the Chinese social interaction in various domains of life.

Laudan (1978), a major scholar in philosophy of science, advocated that the criterion for judging the progress of a theory is its problem solving effectiveness, rather than its confirmability or falsifiability. The most important standard for evaluating a theory is its effectiveness for providing acceptable solutions to relevant problems. In other words, a significant feature of scientific progress is to transform the anomaly and unsolved empirical problems into solved problems. So long as an approximate statement of a problem can be derived from a theory, we

may say that the particular problem had been solved by that theory.

Based on the preceding arguments, this article aims to unite three research traditions of realism, structuralism, and pragmatism to develop a theoretical framework for illuminating conflict resolution in Chinese society. It consists of two parts: the first part explains the Chinese cultural tradition; while the second part derives major propositions of our framework from discursive statements in the first part and cites empirical findings of previous research to support arguments of those propositions.

Chinese Cultural Tradition

Confucian Ethics for Ordinary People

In my book "Knowledge and Action," I analyze the Chinese cultural tradition of Confucianism by the method of structuralism with reference to the theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game", and classify the Confucian ethics for arranging interpersonal relationships into two categories, namely, ethics for the scholar and ethics for ordinary people.

It is the ethics for ordinary people that has a profound influence over Chinese social action in daily life. In analyzing the structure of Confucianism, I adopted the justice theory of Western psychology as a framework for understanding Confucian ethics for ordinary people: It proposed "principle of respecting the superior" as a guideline for procedural justice, emphasizing that decision should be made by one who occupies a superior position in dyadic interaction; meanwhile, it advocated "principle of favoring the intimate" as rules of thumb for distributive justice, insisting that a resource allocator should adopt different rules for exchange to interact with people of various extent of intimacy just as what was described in my model "Face and favor: Chinese power game."

The two parties of dyad interaction were conceptualized as petitioner (P) and resource allocator (RA) in my model (see Figure 1). When P requests RA to distribute a certain kind of resource under RA's control in such a way as to favor P, the first question RA has to consider is "what is the guanxi (relationship) between us?"

Figure 1

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The rectangle representing guanxi in this model was separated into two parts: The portion covered with shadow was termed as "expressive component," denoting the extent of affective attachment between the dyad; the blank portion was termed as "instrumental component," indicating that the major goal for an individual to interact with the other party is to utilize their guanxi as an instrument to acquire certain kind of resource.

Any interpersonal relationship comprises by these two components, while the composition of these two components may change from one relationship to another. Therefore, we may classify an individual's relationships with others into three categories depending on the composition of these two components between them: Expressive ties, mixed ties, and instrumental ties. As an influence of Confucian cultural tradition, a Chinese tends to use three kinds of social exchange rule to interact with people of these three categories, i.e., need rule, renqing rule, and equity rule.

In my book "Knowledge and Action," I indicated that the stages of the psychological processes of RA, namely, judging the guanxi, choosing the appropriate social exchange rule, and resolving the psychological conflict, are correspondent to the Confucian ethical system of Jen-Yi-Li (benevolence-righteousness propriety): The expressive component of guanxi represents Confucian idea about Jen. Stated more explicitly, Confucian scholars advocated that one should do benevolence to others in a hierarchical way, depending on the intimacy of one's relationship with other. Based on this kind of hierarchical benevolence, the Confucian "righteousness" for ordinary people is very different from Western concept about universal "justice" which is highly valued in Christian civilization: Western culture emphasizes the importance of equity rule, while Confucian culture tends to cultivate the need rule for expressive ties as well as the renqing rule for the mixed tie.

Confucian also requests that once when an individual decides to choose a certain rule for social exchange, his or her social action should follow the demand of rites (propriety) no matter what kind of decision he or she made.

Great Self and Small Self

The Confucian ethics for ordinary people described in the previous section can be viewed as an archetype for Chinese social action, since it describes the ideal type of dyadic interaction in Chinese society. As I indicated in Figure 1, when RA is considering one's guanxi with others, it is assumed that any of the interpersonal relationships is composed of an "instrumental component" and an "expressive component." The term "instrumental component" implies that one's physical self was born with various desires which may motivate one to acquire some resources to satisfy one's needs. In such a situation, one may use other as an instrument for acquiring a particular resource. The term "expressive component" was used to denote the affection between one's social self and other party. Confucianism urged that everybody should follow ethical norms for different social rules in order to obtain adequate resources of life with the primary consideration of maintaining social order.

Regulating by the Confucian ethical system of benevolence-righteousness propriety, Chinese are living in a network of guanxi which is relatively stable for a certain period of time. In the process of socialization, they emphasize the importance of taking appropriate action at one's position embedding in one's social network. Their selves tend to become a kind of interdependent

self which is defined by one's social role and relationships, and which is drastically different from the independent self of Western people (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

It should be noted that interdependent self of a Chinese means a "social self." So far as one's "physical self" is concerned, this self is still an independent one, and one must consider how to obtain various resources from external environment to satisfy one's needs. Nevertheless, as an influence of Confucian cultural tradition, the Chinese conceptualization of an "individual" is very different from that of Western people: As a cultural product of Christianity, the self-contained individualism of Western civilization encourages an individual to define the boundary between one and other by the immediate surface surrounding one's physical body (Sampson, 1985; 1988). Conceived by the ensembled individualism of Oriented tradition, though, an individual's "physical self" is dependent upon others, his or her "social self" is embedded in a stable social network. The boundary of an individual's "social self" may be flexible to include such other parties as one's family members, one's friends, or one's colleagues, depending on who participate in the social episode and its nature. In this case, an individual's physical self is usually called as "small self," while one's social self including others is termed as "great self," these two concepts were named as "small body" and "great body" respectively by Mencius.

Confucian cosmology adopts a holistic perspective which believes that change of any object in the universe is a manifestation of the encounter, transaction, and transformation between two opposing forces of yin and yang. Human beings make no exception to this rule. Viewing from the Confucian perspective, marriage between husband and wife is not only an unification of two independent entities, but also a combination of two opposing but complementary forces of yin and yang; with children as products of their unification. The creation of an individual's life is just the same as the creation of any object in the universe. Based on this kind of cosmology, Chinese tend to conceptualize the family as a whole and analogize it to a human body (the "great body"). For instance, Chinese parents usually call their children as their own flesh and blood; while brotherhood is frequently described as the relationship between hands and feet. Therefore, family can be viewed as an archetype of Chinese "great self."

Similar ideas can be generalized to other types of vertical relationship. For examples, the chief of a government office in Imperial China was privately called the "dragon head"; his trusted subordinates were called "shin-fuh" (heart and belly), while their retainers and backseats might be scorned as "jao-ya" (nails and teeth) by ordinary people (e.g., Sterba, 1978). The same labeling system can also be used to denote roles occupying different positions in power structure of contemporary Chinese organization (e.g., Silin, 1976; Walder, 1983).

Lian and Mientze

When a group of Chinese are interacting with others for a particular social affair, they may form impressions about every participant involved in that affair and arrange them along either a vertical dimension according to their relative role positions or according to the power structure of that social network (Bond and Lee, 1981). An individual's awareness about a public image formed in other's minds is called "face," which can be differentiated into two categories in Chinese society: "Mientze" is determined by one's performance, and "lian" is related to one's moral conduct (King, 1988). The greater performance one has, the higher position one occupies, or the more resource one controls, the greater "mientze" one has. "Lian" has nothing to do with one's

performance. So far as one's conduct meets moral or ethical demands for his social role, he or she will have "lian" to face with others in the network.

According to Confucian cultural ideal, high positions in the social structure should be occupied by those who stick to the moral standards or moral principles. However, morality and performance are two independent dimensions for evaluating one's face: a person with brilliant "mientze" may not be a gentleman (jiuntze) who cares about one's own moral conduct; a jiuntze whose moral "lian" has never been questioned by the community may have no career performance. Of course, as a combination of these two dimensions, we can find some cases who have neither moral "lian" nor career "mientze" (Zai, 1995).

When an individual is interacting with other parties in the network, all members of the in-group may evaluate his or her "face" along the dimension of either performance or morality. By the same token, when an individual represents his or her group to interact with members of another group, others may also evaluate the "face" of his or her "great self" along these two dimensions. Such Chinese sayings as "glorifying one's forebears," "glorifying one's household," "Winning glory for one's fatherland," "losing our family's face," "having no face to go back home to see one's elders," are examples of the latter.

The Value of Harmony

Both Taoism and Confucianism believe that the two opposing and complementary forces (chi) of yin and yang should be maintained in a harmonious state no matter what level they are operating on, such as universe, nature, society, or an individual (Li, 1996). "Everything will be accomplished smoothly in a harmonious family," Confucius advocated that internal harmony should also be treasured as the highest value within a family, just as it is essential to the smooth functioning of a system at any other level.

Such a value system was gradually formed and sustained by the agricultural ecology of traditional Chinese society which was characterized by a high population density with relatively low social mobility. Bound to their residing area, the agricultural way of production enabled most Chinese families to obtain limited resources. In order to distribute resources among members of a group, it was necessary to emphasize the value of harmony (LaBarre, 1945; Stover, 1974). Nevertheless, once the value system was formed, it became hard core of Chinese culture and because resistant to change. For example, Yang (1988) reviewed previous research on family that had been done in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Her review indicated that what has been changed in the course of development in all three regions is the father/son axis structure. As a result of better education opportunities for the young, legal protection of woman's rights, or female employment, the elderly (especially the male parents) may lose their economic power. They may have nothing to say in their children's marriage partner selection, and may be unable to make binding decisions on family spending. However, one aspect of Chinese familism that has not changed across different socio-political regions is mutual dependence. In order to repay parents' continuing nurturing and protecting throughout their lives, the younger generations tend to try hard to fulfill the wishes of their parents and to support them in their senior years. Once any member of the family encounters difficulty in life, other members are obliged to provide necessary aid to him.

Viewing from the theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game," these facts

imply that Chinese still tend to use "need rule" to interact with family members through expressive ties. The tendency to change in Chinese familism is also manifested in changes of their value system. In my research on the modern transformation of Confucian values (Hwang, 1995), I asked 633 Taiwanese elites to evaluate the relative importance of a series of value items to (1) their parents, and to (2) themselves. The results showed that, compared to their parents, subjects placed less importance on value items related to emphasizing the value of family with a suppression of oneself, including "being a dutiful wife and loving mother," "having outstanding children," "having decedents for the sake of filial piety," "maintaining precedence between seniors and juniors". This means that they devote less effort than their last generation to maintain the vertical power structure that is based the father/son axis inside the family. However, the importance of "a pleasant family," "a happy marriage," and "harmony" to them were the same as that to their last generation.

The reasons for Chinese people to treasure the value of harmony mainly derive from life experience of their early socialization. Some cross-cultural research indicated that, in comparison with American (Sollenberger, 1968), Israeli, Indian, or Ethiopian mothers (Ryback, Sanders, Lorenz, and Koestenblatt, 1988), Chinese mothers were less likely to allow aggressive behavior in their children. In another cross-cultural research, Niem and Collard (1972) asked Chinese mothers from Taiwan and American mothers from Massachusetts to record their disciplining of children's aggression over a thirty day period. They found roughly the same number of aggressive episodes from these two groups of children, but Chinese children were more likely to receive some form of parental discipline in response.

"Dutiful sons are the product of the rods", many Confucian scholars suggested that children must be disciplined by both methods of punishment and giving advice (Lin and Wang, 1995). Much empirical research indicates that Chinese parents may use harsh physical punishment (Solomon, 1971; Wolf, 1964), withdrawal of rewards, or exclusion from the social life of the family (Sollenberger, 1968; Niem and Collard, 1972) to inhibit aggressive behavior of their children, depending on their social-class, with rural-urban or sub-ethnic variations; the primary goal of child-rearing practices is to maintain harmonious family or neighborhood relations (Bond and Wang, 1981).

Conflict Resolution Models in Chinese Society

Growing up in such a cultural background, a Chinese may acquire several models of conflict resolution to deal with interpersonal conflict happening in different kinds of social relationships. There were several Western scholars who had developed various models of conflict resolution or conflict management by proposing different systems of classification. For examples, Hall(1969) classified five types of conflict resolution along the dimensions of "achieving personal goal" and "interpersonal consideration" (Filley, 1975); Thomas (1976) constituted five conflict resolution models by the dimension of "assertive vs. unassertive" and "cooperative vs. Uncooperative;" and Rahim (1986) proposed his classification system with the dimensions of "concern for self" and "concern for others." Some Chinese scholars had adopted their conceptual framework and measurement instruments to study the conflict resolution process in Chinese society (e.g. Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991; Liu, 1993). But, I believe that the conceptual frameworks developed in individualistic cultures by Western scholars cannot provide an adequate basis for

describing conflict resolution models in Oriental culture. In order to construct an adequate theory of conflict resolution in Chinese society, it is essential to take into consideration their cultural value of harmony as well as their specific features of interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, I modified Hall's (1969) scheme, replaced his two dimensions with "pursuing vs. discarding personal goal" and "maintaining vs. ignoring interpersonal harmony," and constructed a preliminary model of Chinese conflict resolution (see Fig. 2). The model proposes that an actor has to adopt a particular type of conflict resolution only when an opponent insists on attaining a personal goal which is contradictory to the actor's goal. In such a situation, the actor has to ask himself two questions: "Do I want to maintain interpersonal harmony?" "Do I want to pursue my personal goal?"

Figure 2

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If one gives up a personal goal for the sake of maintaining interpersonal harmony, he or she may choose the response of endurance. If one disregards interpersonal harmony and insists on pursuing a personal goal, one may confront the other party. If one attempts to maintain interpersonal harmony, but doesn't want to give up a personal goal, he or she may pretend to obey publicly while doing his or her own business privately. If one is concerned about interpersonal harmony, and is willing to yield a few steps, one may compromise with the other. If one decides to disregard either interpersonal harmony or attainment of a personal goal, one may quarrel with the other, and their relationship may come to a severance.

But these five types are insufficient to describe conflict resolution processes in Chinese society. In order to provide a complete picture on this issue, it is necessary to take the Chinese interpersonal relationships into consideration. Based on my analysis of Confucian ethics for ordinary people, the relationships between two roles involved in interpersonal conflict can be differentiated into vertical and horizontal relationships. The Confucian cultural ideal assumes that all vertical relationships should be in-group relations, but horizontal ones might be either in-group or out-group. Therefore, there are three kinds of interpersonal relationships: Vertical in-group, horizontal in-group, and horizontal out-group. Viewing from my theoretical model about Chinese power game, horizontal out-group must be a certain kind of instrumental ties, while horizontal in-group should be expressive ties.

From the viewpoint of Western philosophy of science, most theoretical models constructed on the basis of realism are synchronic theories. But, a significant feature of interpersonal networks in collectivistic societies is their temporal continuity. Through we can construct our theoretical framework about Chinese conflict resolution by taking a conflict episode as the unit of analysis, it should be noted that a conflict episode may last for a period of time. The conflict resolution model which an actor adopts may also change from time to time. Therefore, when we want to construct a theoretical framework for managing conflicts with people of these three types of interpersonal relationship, it is necessary to consider the following aspects: (1) harmony maintenance, (2) personal goal attainment, (3) coordination strategies, and (4) dominant responses. (See Table 1)

Table 1

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When a subordinate is in conflict with his superior in vertical relationship, he or she has to protect the superior's face for the sake of maintaining interpersonal harmony. In this case, the dominant response may be endurance. If one wants to expressive an opinion, he or she usually takes the way of indirect communication. If one intends to pursue a personal goal, he or she may pretend to obey but pursue a personal goal privately.

The conflict management strategies one may utilize in horizontal relationships depend on whether the other party is an in-group or out-group member. When an actor is in conflict with an in-group member, they may communicate directly. For the maintenance of harmonious relationship, they may "give face" to each other and reach a compromise. When one of them insists on attaining his personal goal in spite of other's feeling, they may have intramural fight for a long time. On the other hand, if both of them insist on attainment of their personal goal, they may treat each other as out-group members and have a confrontation with the opposite party. Meanwhile, they may disregard interpersonal harmony and strive to protect their own face. In order to resolve the conflict situation, a third party may be invited to serve as a mediator for intervention, and their relationship may be severed as a consequence of their conflict.

When a superior insists on the attainment of a personal goal disregarding feelings of subordinates in a vertical relationship, subordinates may also react to oppose the superior, and their relationship may also come to a severance.

These are the major propositions in the theoretical framework on conflict resolution in Chinese society. In the following sections, I will further elaborate these propositions for the three types of relationship stated above.

Vertical In-Group

Before our discussion on vertical relationship, it should be emphasized that the Confucian ethics for ordinary people as described in previous section of this article is a formal structure that can be used to interpret social interaction between different roles. According to the Confucian cultural ideal, such relationships as father/son, husband/wife, senior/junior brother, and superior/subordinate, should be arranged in a vertical way. However, I am not a cultural determinist. From the perspective of constructionism (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1985), the relationships between people in daily life are constructed in the process of social interaction. Though traditional culture may define the arrangement of role relationship in a particular way under the impact of foreign culture, it is very likely that people may construct their relationship in a completely different way according to the resources they held and the agreement they made. For example, in a study of marriage violence in Taiwan, Chen (1992) divided her female informants into two groups on the basis of their experience with marriage violence. Among the group who experienced violence, 65% reported that their husbands were more powerful in deciding family affairs; 18% said they were more powerful, and the rest reported equal power. Among the group without violent experience, 50% got equal power, 30% perceived themselves as the more powerful ones, only 13% reports their husbands were more powerful. In other words, Confucianism advocated that the relationship between husband and wife should be arranged as husband-superior/ wife-subordinate; but in real life, the vertical relationship can be reversed, it can also be arranged as an equal power one.

It seems that the above statistics indicate a correlation between the experience of marriage

violence and the family power structure arrangement of husband-superior/ wife-subordinate. But I do not intend to discuss this issue here. What I want to say is conflict resolution models can be used in different relationships by the actor.

Forbearance

It was mentioned in previous section that Confucianism emphasizes the value of harmony. When one is conflicting with someone else within his or her social network, the first thing one has to learn is "forbearance.. The concept of "forbearance" (ren) has a profound cultural foundation in China (Lee, 1997). All the philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism provide ideas for supporting the practice of "forbearance." In its broadest sense, "forbearance" means to control and to suppress one's emotion, desire, and psychological impulse. In Fig. 2, "endurance" means not only restraining one's psychological impulse, but also giving up one's personal goal, for a prior consideration of maintaining a harmonious relationship. Moreover, there is another implication of ren, "perseverance" (jian-ren) means to obviate all difficulties to attain one's final goal.

Endurance

As I mentioned before, Confucian ethics for ordinary people proposed the "principle of respecting superior" as its procedural justice which advocated that decisions in social interaction should be made by the superior who occupies a higher position. In actual life, when a superior with power requests the subordinate to follow his demands, usually the later can do nothing but to obey. The subordinate who has his or her own goal may thus experience a feeling of strong conflict, but, under power domination of the superior, he or she tends to give up the personal goal by following the practice of endurance. Li (1995) interviewed a group of young couples residing in Taipei about their adjustment to marriage life. Her research indicated that "endurance" and self-control is a strategy they frequently used to cope with life stress. For instance, a daughter-in-law living with her husband's parents after her marriage told her a story:

"I got much less time for myself after I was married. I almost stayed at home all day.... For example, last time there were two or three underwear to be washed, I thought I can do it on the other day. But, my father-in-law wasn't happy. He didn't like to see any clothes uncleaned overnight. He told my husband, and my husband told me about that. It was 11 o'clock in night that I washed them with tears."

Indirect Communication

Forbearance cannot solve one's problem in many situations. When a subordinate disagrees with his or her superior's decision, a prior consideration of protecting the superior's face may inhibit him or her to express disagreement publicly or directly. In this case, one may ask somebody in their social network to send the message to the superior.

I have said that Chinese are living in various kinds of social networks. As it was indicated in my theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game," relationships within any dyad may be regarded as either very close or only insignificant. An old Chinese saying goes that "Do not talk too deep when you are not close enough with the other," when an individual believes that the expressive component of his relationship with the superior is not strong enough for direct communication, he or she has should better express an opinion through people close to the

superior. For example, Silin (1976) studied the operation and leadership style of a large scale business in Taiwan by participant observation. He found when the top leader of company speaks in public, the subordinates would never raise any question to challenge him or to injure his dignity. If they really believe that the leader's opinions are inappropriate, they usually ask people trusted by the leader to pass the message for them in private.

Confrontation

In a power structure emphasizing "principle of respecting the superior," when the superior ignores feelings of the subordinates and insists on the execution of his will, the inferior may react to fight against him. Both parties "tear off their faces" and confront with open conflict. As it was indicated in Chen's (1992) research on 55 cases of marriage violence in Taiwan, a majority of female victims reported that their reactions to the violent treatment from their husbands for the first time were crying or keeping silence (25 cases, 45%); some of them bawled back (17 cases, 23%) or fought back (7 cases, 13%), while a few of them went back to their parents' houses (3 cases, 5%). It should be noted that even when the victims told their parents how they had suffered, their parents usually suggested that women should forbear about that. Their parents-in-laws also gave them similar advice by saying: because their sons had long been like that and would never change. So, it would be better to follow the policy of "opening one eye, with another eye closed."

As the conceptual framework about conflict resolution in Table 1 illustrated, the dominant response of both victims and their family members to their husbands' violent behaviors was "endurance." But, some of victims may fight back for the status of equal rights which may lead to "confrontation." At this time, the vertical relationship between them changes into a horizontal one. According to the Confucian cultural ideal, the interpersonal relationships inside the family should be arranged on the basis of "benevolence" (jen), which was represented by the strong expressive component of the expressive ties in the theoretical model of Fig. 1. If the superior doesn't note the change, but keeps on imposing his will over the subordinate, the latter may not want to forbear anymore. The more serious the conflicts between them, the weaker the expressive component that remains in their relationship. When there remains only the instrumental component, both sides may calculate carefully about their own interests in maintaining the relationship. Once they believe that divorce is beneficial to both of them, their relationship may be severed.

Caring about Other's Face in a Perfunctory Manner

It is easy to understand that not all vertical relationships have a strong basis of expressive component. For example, the superior/subordinate relationship in contemporary industrial or commercial organizations is primarily based on instrumental component. Its expressive component should be fostered purposely by both parties (especially the superior side) in their daily interaction. Under such circumstance, when interpersonal conflicts occur to weaken their expressive tie, both parties still have to interact with each other within the same power structure. In this case, they are forced to keep the superficial harmony by following the social manners. As a cultural ideal of Confucianism, "politeness" without any ingredient of "benevolence" is called by Chinese as "caring about other's face superficially" (fu-yeu mien-tze).

Huang (1995) mentioned a case in her research on Chinese interpersonal harmony and conflicts: A female subject who had once conflicted with her boss said how she coped with the

situation:

After that, I don't talk about business seriously with him. Since I hate him, I chatter to him about trivial matters, and nothing serious. I will never go to see him when there is no necessity. When we meet, I am able to keep a perfunctory harmony with him. Yes, it is social, you may say it is insincere." (pp. 264)

Taking Care of Other's Face

This is not a situation Confucians like to see. As I said in the last section, the Confucian ideal advocated that all the vertical relationships within a family or a group should be constructed on the basis of "benevolence" (expressive component) to constitute a united whole. I also mentioned that whether an individual will develop an in-group feeling of "great-self" with other or not is certainly a psychological matter. When an individual's relationship with a particular family member or a colleague worsens and its expressive component decreases, outsiders may still perceive them as an "in-group." In this case, they have to do their best to take care of other's face in front of outsiders and to maintain a superficial harmony so as to let everybody under their own face. For example, a male subject reported in Li's (1995) research:

"Now they are living in their own way, and we are living in ours. Though we are living under the same roof, they sleep in that room, and we sleep in this room. We eat separately, my parents cook their food, my wife and I cook ours.....The two old parents still want to keep the superficial ethics. They are afraid of being scorned by relatives and friends. Though they blame me and accuse of my conduct against filial piety everyday, they still tell our relatives and friends that they have filial children." (Li, 1995:285)

Huang's(1995)research mentioned how a male employee working in a company "packages" his relationship with his supervisor:

"I am able to 'package' our relationship. I will do anything to make outsiders get an impression that we get along quite well. Sometimes, I will respect his authority as a supervisor. So long as his requests are not very unfair, I will follow rather than resist them indiscriminately. When we are facing outsiders, I will stand at the same front with him and fight against outsiders. Because a department is a whole, we should maintain the vertical relation of up and down. This is a kind of work ethic. So I would make outsiders feel that I follow instruction. This is a superficial harmony. Don't let each other feel too embarrassing, it will be enough to maintain the 'public' part. Business is business." (Huang, 1996:262)

Obey Publicly and Defy Privately

In a power structure emphasizing vertical relationship, when a subordinate feels conflicts with the superior and knows that it is useless to argue with the other of dominant power, he or she may accept the superior's request in public, but do one's own business in private. In contemporary China, this pretending to obey is called "the superior has a policy to impose on , while the inferior has a trick to cope with it."

In imperial China, officials of local government usually used this strategy to deal with the endless orders and demands from the central government. According to a sociological analysis by Zou(1995), because the vast territory and the inconvenient transportation of imperial China, it is very hard for the central government to understand every detail of the locals. They tend to ask the

local government to obey their orders regardless of local situations. Bounded by the Confucian ideology, the local government dares not to resist against orders from the top, so they have to adopt the strategy of pretending to obey to deal with the superior.

In the daily life of Chinese people, the inferior in a power structure may use a similar strategy to deal with the superior. In her research on the contents and functions of Chinese interpersonal relationships, Li(1997) mentioned how a medical doctor's son used this strategy to deal with his father.

"When he asked me to do something, if I had an opposite opinion, I would tell him that I didn't like to do his way before. But he had a bad temper. If you argue with him, he becomes more tough. Because it is useless to argue with him, now I say 'yes, yes, yes' to any of his requests, but I still do my own way. In any case, we won't talk more than a few sentences when we meet every day. My father is always busy. He sleeps till eleven to twelve o'clock in the morning and works at the clinic from 2 P.M. to 10 P.M.. I do my own business in my room, I won't face him." (Li, 1997:23)

Horizontal In-Group

The horizontal relationship could be said to be the most important interpersonal relationship in contemporary societies where industrial and commercial activities are major ways of production. However, the arrangement of horizontal relationship was not the major concern of Confucian ethics. In the five cardinal ethics stressed by Confucius, only "friends" belong to the horizontal relationship. However, as I mentioned before, the arrangement of interpersonal relationship is constructed in the process of dyadic interaction in daily life. Any kind of relationship can be constructed as a horizontal relationship.

In my theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game," horizontal relationships consist in some cases of expressive ties and in all cases of instrumental ties. The reason for an individual to establish instrumental ties with somebody else according to a particular formal role system is to acquire certain resources to satisfy his or her needs. Both parties involved in this relationship control some resources which are desired by the other party, so they can proceed making exchange with each other on a basis of equality.

In the "psychological process of RA" of Fig. 1, the instrumental ties and mixed ties are separated by a dotted line. It means that, compared with boundary surrounding expressive ties within a family, the psychological boundary between these two kinds of relationships is relatively weak. The P may have an instrumental relationship of out-group to RA originally. Through the process of "pulling guanxi" or "reinforcing guanxi," P may penetrate the psychological boundary, get into the category of mixed ties and become a friend of RA. On the contrary, the relatives or friends of mixed ties may become a kind of instrumental ties or come to a severance because of intense conflicts or estrangement of relationship between them.

Giving Face

Understanding the significant features of horizontal relationship, we may discuss the conflict resolution models listed in Table 1. According to my theoretical model of "Face and favor: Chinese power game," when RA defines P as a member of his in-group who belongs to the category of mixed ties, they tend to interact with each other in terms of renqing rule and have to pay special attention to maintain other's face. If they disagree about something, they may have a

direct communication for the sake of seeking a solution which is acceptable to both parties. In such a situation, Chinese always say that "we are all brothers, it is needless to argue." In the process of negotiation, they may take various ways and ask others to "give me a face." "Quarrel makes both sides ugly; while concession enables both to have their own shares." In order to keep their harmonious relationship, they tend to concede and "give face" to each other. Therefore, both of them are able to "get off the stage" and compromise with other party.

I argued in the previous section that a couple may construct their relationship either in a traditional vertical way or in a modern horizontal way. In the later case, only if there is a strong expressive component existing in their relationship, even when they argue about trivia in daily life, it would not hurt their feelings. Meanwhile, if one of the couple (usually the male) uses verbal or nonverbal communication to ask for compromise, "gives face" to the other, and enable her/him to "get off the stage," it is quite possible that their unhappiness will be eliminated. For instances, Li(1995) mentioned how a husband may dissolve the problem after quarreling with his wife.

"I can't remember any specific case of quarreling with her. Each time we have a quarrel, I smile to her first, then she smiles, too."

"When she was angry, I could not say anything to her.....we may quarrel about something nonsense out of trivia. Finally, I keep quiet when she was angry. I would wait and talk to her when she was not angry anymore."

Fight Overtly and Struggle Covertly

When one insists on the attainment of his personal goal without "giving face" to the other in horizontal relationship, the other may be forced to yield for various reasons. In this case, their relationship may become worse and consist of no expressive component any more. When they meet with each other, they may pretend to take care of other's face by some superficial forms of propriety. Anyone who fails to do this might be criticized as "impolite" or "uncultivated." For instance, in Huang's(1997) research, a male informant talked about his relationship with one of his colleagues:

"Social manners mean what we have to do when you encounter someone, such as saying hello or exchanging a smile." He said: "It is important to follow social manners, because one should be cultivated with some basic terms for being a human. For example, I don't like to talk with the person we just met. But, when he walked by your side, it is unnecessary to let him know that you disliked him. Saying hello does not mean that I like him. At least, it enables me not to think about how disgusting he is and not to make new frown." He said: "Interaction following social manners may relieve us of psychological burden. You don't need think too much, and can get temporary peace without thinking about the discord with him." (Huang, 1996:245)

When two parties in a formal organization are required to negotiate for some controversial issues by their social roles, their dissatisfactions with each other may "emerge from under table." "Covert struggle" becomes "overt fight" which may make their relationship worse. In Huang's (1996) research, an informant was manager of quality control department in a factory. The task structure at the working site made him conflict with chief of the production department frequently. Though these conflicts were mediated by high-ranking administrators of the company, his attitudes were tough and the atmosphere was always deadlock. Even the chief of the production

department apologized and the conflict was solved temporarily, some grudges remained in their minds.

He said: "After so many disputes, my requirement for quality is not loosened but more tightened. This is my responsibility. Beside quality, I also have my sensibility. Since he always make troubles for me, I just want to have an eye for eye. Although I had some ideas to tease him, I never take the action. Actually, I always question him and this embarrasses him. Needless to say, I often exaggerate the products' degrees of danger to scare him." (Huang, 1996:260)

In the process of long-term fight overtly and covertly, both sides may utilize various schemes of trick to deal with the other. Chinese also have a cultural tradition of using stratagems in daily life (Wang, 1996). Stories about "thirty-six stratagems" are well-known to many Chinese (Chiao, 1981, 1985). As I pointed out in my book "Knowledge and Action" (Hwang, 1995), the utilization of stratagems comes from military tactics of the Martial School. When the actor defines the opposite as an out-group member of instrumental tie, or when the expressive component of a vertical relationship disappears, it is most likely for an individual to use strategic behavior. For example, in her study on relationship between mother- and daughter-in-law, Che (1997) reported an interesting case:

"One day, hitting upon a sudden idea, she put her feet on a table and asked me to cut nails for her. You see, I never did this even for my mother, and she asked me to cut her nails! Her daughter was there, she didn't ask her to cut, but asked me! You see how I dealt with her."

"Why you didn't reject her?"

"If I rejected, I will offend not only her but also everybody in our family. Because she said I couldn't bow down, I couldn't see. As her daughter-in-law, you can't reject. So, I said, where? Let me see. Because I always have my glasses on my eyes, if I cut you, you must be tolerant. Ha, I said it first, you must be tolerant. Then I cut, she said 'Oh!' I said 'Sorry, sorry, I can't see it!' Don't reject her immediately, otherwise she will ask you to do many things and tell your husband." (Che, 1997:53-54)

Horizontal Out-Group

Confrontation

When the covert struggle emerges from the under table and becomes an overt fight, the outburst of conflict may make the parties lose their tempers. They may confront each other for some substantial goals or interests; they also find some excuses to quarrel with each other for relieving their inner hostilities or tensions. This kind of conflict for "striving face" or "striving for vindication" was called as "autistic conflict" by Western psychologists, while the former was termed as "realistic conflict" (Holmes and Miller, 1976).

There was a series of previous research which indicated that Chinese aggressive behaviors towards out-group members are very drastic. They may attack the opposite by either public abuse or collective violence (Bond and Wang, 1981). Ward (1970) interpreted this phenomenon in terms of the absence of peaceful modes of conflict resolution between out-groups in Chinese culture. Even in a situation where verbal confrontation is supposed to be requisite of a particular role relationship, disputants may use physical aggression instead of verbal debate. For instance, my book "The Whirlpool of Power" describes how legislators of different parties are engaged in a

power struggle on arena of parliament since Taiwan adopted the democratic system (Hwang, 1997).

Kuo(1994) examined the argumentative strategies used in legislative question and answer session from parliamentary interpolations in Taiwan. He found that most questions from opposition legislators were designed to blame or criticize government officials, whose anticipation prompted them to become defensive. However, several combative officials did not respond to challenges or accusations with justifications or denials but with counter-actions identical to the accusing questions in surface structure. Hostility in this type of adversarial dialogue was frequently conveyed by sarcasm. On the other hand, embarrassed officials occasionally offered conciliatory responses, including the invoking of shared wants and social memberships, to get out of specific predicament.

Mediation

When Chinese people get involved in intense conflict, third parties in their social network tend to intervene between them to reduce the likelihood of spiraling violence (Brown, 1977; Ma, 1992). The mediator usually is someone who occupies a higher position in their network. His major job is to separate the opposing sides and to find out a solution without any loss of "face" to either side (Bond and Wang, 1981). In order to achieve this goal, he is likely to ask both sides: "For the sake of my face, don't quarrel anymore." "Stop the quarrel, or you will lose our face" (Zai, 1995). If the mediator has sufficient face, then the parties may cease hostility without losing face because they can construe their peace-making as protecting the mediator's face (Cohen, 1967).

Conclusion

In this article, I synthesize the research traditions of realism, structuralism, and pragmatism to construct a theoretical framework about models of conflict resolution in Chinese society on the basis of my previous research on Chinese cultural tradition. A series of qualitative research studies were cited to support the major arguments of this article, because empirical data of case study may preserve the context of interpersonal conflict which should be studied with extraordinary carefulness in Oriental society. Of course, the major propositions of this article can also be confirmed by quantitative research so long as the social context has been taken into consideration. For example, an cross-cultural research on the resolving procedure of interpersonal conflict indicated that, compared with American subjects, their Chinese counterparts preferred bargaining between two sides and mediation by third party to negotiate for a scheme of compromise. They relatively dislike confrontation with each other and being judged by third parties. They also dislike the inquisitorial adjudication with which the third party collects relevant information to make a judgment (Leung, 1987).

Chen (1994) went a further step by taking into consideration the context of interpersonal relationship in which an individual has to choose a resolving procedure. Asking 114 students of National Taiwan University to serve as subjects, his empirical research indicated that the subjects tend to choose a conforming response in vertical relationship with high expressive component; they prefer to accept the superior's authoritarian decision in vertical relationship with low expressive component. In horizontal relationship with high expressive component, they prefer the

procedure of bargaining; while in horizontal relationship with high instrumental component, they prefer the procedure of mediation. Chen's data provided remarkable support to the main propositions of this article.

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