

A Chinese Perspective of Intercultural Organization-public Relationship¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework of intercultural relationships in a general and intercultural organization-public relationship, particularly from a Chinese perspective. The discussion is divided into three aspects: (1) a comparison of the Chinese and Western views of the concepts of relationships, *guanxi*, and organization-public relationship, (2) reviews of existing literature focus on the theory of Chinese Relationalism and the challenges facing Chinese Relationalism, and (3) provision of suggestions for future research directions.

Introduction

Given the globalization of the business economy, communication managers and public relations practitioners in multi-national organizations now face a variety of cultural challenges. In East Asian countries, research shows the prevalence of the personal-influencing model of public relations (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang and Lyra, 1995; Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki, 1999). In contrast to Western public relations practitioners who tend to use communication techniques that emphasize information exchange, published works reveal that in Taiwan, India, and Japan, public relations practitioners are inclined to use the personal-influencing model that focuses on interpersonal relationship. Namely, public relations practitioners in these areas tend to rely on relational skills in order to establish long-lasting, personal relationships with key individuals in the media, the government, and in political and activist groups. Given the prevalence of the personal-influencing model in East Asian countries, the most obvious challenge for communication managers and public relations practitioners in international organizations results from this unique characteristic, i.e., intercultural relationship.

The challenges of intercultural relationship from an East Asian perspective can be explored from two aspects. First, relationship or *guanxi* has long been considered a core concept in understanding Chinese social behavior (Chang, 2001; Chen & Chung, 1994; Hwang, 1987; Leung, Wong & Wong, 1996; Liang, 1987; Wen, 1988; King, 1985). Understanding *guanxi* from an indigenous perspective thus becomes quite critical. In essence, as stated in Huang (2000),

guanxi is a key to understanding Chinese behavior in social (Fried, 1969), political (Jacobs, 1979), and organizational (Walder, 1983) contexts. Three important aspects help convey the role of relationships in Chinese society: “1) People exist through, and are defined by, their relationships to others; 2) these relationships are structured hierarchically; 3) social order is ensured through each party’s honoring the requirements in the role of relationships” (Bond & Hwang, 1986). In a similar vein, Bond and Hwang (1986) concluded their observation on Chinese society in that Chinese see humans as relational beings, socially situated and “defined within an interactive context” (quoted in Huang, 2000, p.222).

The second challenge concerns the differences in the fundamental purpose and nature of communication between Asian and Western cultures (Scollon & Scollon, 1994). As suggested in Scollon and Scollon (1994), in Western cultures the purpose of communication is information exchange. By contrast, people in Asian cultures communicate for the purpose of relationship building and maintenance; they emphasize relationships over communication. Moreover, the nature of communication also differs between the two cultures. For Westerners, communication mirrors scientific exploration, while for Chinese the paradigm comes closer to the rituals of communication with ancestors, with an emphasis on relationship maintenance (Scollon & Scollon, 1994). Similarly, Chang (2001) noted that in contrast to Western cultures, where “communication” is often seen as an expression of “self,” Chinese cultures treat “communication” as a means of reaffirming the communicators as a member of society and of maintaining existing relations.

Given the aforementioned challenges, an enhanced understanding of the East Asian aspects of intercultural relationship becomes critical. The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework of intercultural relationships in a general and intercultural organization-public relationship, particularly from a Chinese perspective. Three notes should be made concerning the scope of the topic examined. The first is that a Chinese perspective rather than an East Asian perspective is adopted in this current paper for the purpose of clarification. The justification is that Confucianism is the main source resulting in the said “relationship phenomenon” in East Asian countries. Exploring the intercultural relationship from a Chinese perspective should be warranted.

Secondly, the reason that an organization-public relationship is particularly examined is to respond to practical situations that communication managers and public relations practitioners encounter in multinational organizations. In Western public relation theories, J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations as the “management of relationship between an organization and its publics” (p.6). The role of public relations practitioners is considered to be like an “organizational boundary spanner,” (Leifer & Delbecq, 1978) who “works at

organizations' peripheral areas or boundaries to interact with organizations' internal and external strategic publics (or stakeholders) and environments." (p. 40-41). Thus, organization-public relationships rather than an interpersonal relationship or one of another sort is explored.

Thirdly, the basic premise of developing this intercultural framework is that such an exploration should be preceded by and rooted in a sound conceptual specification of societal cultures. The theory of Chinese Relationalism, which will be discussed later, is used as a discussion conduit in view of its pertinence for the exploration of the intercultural relationship. This paper will first compare the Eastern and Western views of the concepts of relationships and *guanxi*. The theory of Chinese Relationalism and the challenges facing Chinese Relationalism will then be discussed. Lastly, the framework of intercultural organization-public relations that provide suggestions for future research will be proposed.

The Definitions of the Concepts Examined: Comparison of the Chinese and Western Views

In spite that intercultural relationship is an important aspect in the field of communication management, there has been lack of scholarly attention to cross-culturally compare the conceptual definitions of relationship in general and organization-public relationship in particular. Organization-public relationship will be first discussed, followed by relationship.

Organization-public Relationship

Research on organization-public relationships in the late-1990s became increasingly extent in the field of public relations (Heath, 2001; Ledingham & Brunning, 2000). From a Western perspective, in an organization-public relationship, strategic publics, stakeholders, or constituencies are composed of the following properties (Huang, 2001a). First, a public is a group of individuals. The group of individuals could belong to a formal organization, an informal organization, or be a group of unrelated individuals. Second, a public is a group of people that exert an impact on an organization or a group of people for whom the organization could cause problems; in other words, there is a commonality of interests or stakes involved in the relationship between the public and the organization. Third, a public is a group of people who are aware and are active stakeholders regarding some specific issues of an organization. To sum up, an organization's publics are those that could be identified, such as community, media, government, stockholders, consumers, or those unidentified such as environmentalists, voters, etc. Thus, organization-public relationships are conceptualized as the relationships between an organization and its publics or

stakeholders.

From intercultural and inter-disciplinary perspectives, two main problems areas involved in the abovementioned theories need to be resolved. First, although the scope of such research has been broad and has included studies on conceptualization, measurements, and effects, much of it is limited to monocultural discussions. Essentially, the line of such research is based almost exclusively upon Western individualistic culture as a prerequisite. In response, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) advocated that research in organization-public relationships should be discussed from varied social and cultural parameters. Second, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) concluded that most relevant research has been limited to single field studies based on interpersonal relationships, organizational relationship, or organizational communication, and very rarely do inter-disciplinary discussions exist.

From Chinese-cultural perspective, the concept of organization-public relationship is quite under-developed. Chinese studies right after the recent turn of the century on this subject area lack the perspective of indigeness. Taking Taiwan as an example, Huang's (2001b) content analyses of 144 journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and master's theses involving the subject of relationships in the 1990s found that such studies either resort primarily to Western relationship marketing theories or borrow completely from the concepts, models, and methodologies of public relations studies in the U.S. Studies based on indigenous conceptualizations from a Chinese context are indeed rare.

The Definitions of Relationship and *Guanxi*

The meaning of "relationship" in Chinese is succinctly much broader than that in the West. Huang (2001c) cited the works of Xiong (1996) and pointed out that the fundamental English definition of *guanxi* cannot properly express the Chinese meaning of *guanxi*. Thus, when scholars express the concept of Eastern "relationship" in English, they tend to use the Chinese term "*guanxi*" and then make an explanation in their works (Xiong, 1996). Possible English translations of the term *guanxi* include: relationship/connections, personal network (Mitchell, 1969), reticulum (Kapferer, 1969), and particularistic ties (Jacobs, 1979). Huang (2001c) compiled Eastern and Western scholars' views and concepts on "relationship" and *guanxi* and pointed out that there are both similarities and differences in the way each defines relationship. Similar views are first explored, followed by divergent views.

Convergent Views. A convergent view by Eastern and Western scholars toward the meaning of relationship is defined through the following two aspects: 1) Subjectivity versus objectivity, which sees "relationships" as a subjective reality, objective reality, or combinations of subjective and objective realities; and 2) process versus state which sees "relationships" as a process, state, or both

a process and state (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997; Huang, 2001c).²

Western research assuming the first point of view considers relationship to be either a subjective or objective reality. For example, scholars such as Duck (1973, 1986) view relationships as a subjective reality, while Katz and Kahn (1967), Klir (1991), Miller (1978), Laumann, Galashiewicz, and Marsden (1978), Oliver (1990), Van de Ven (1976), and Van de Ven and Walker (1984) consider relationships to be an objective reality. Moreover, scholars such as Anderson (1993), Ballinger (1991), Cappella (1991), Gelso and Carter (1985, 1994), Hinde (1988), Huston and Robins (1982), Kerns (1994), Millar and Roger (1987), Surra and Ridley (1991), and Sexton and Whiston (1994) consider relationships to be a combination of subjective and objective realities. The second definition considers relationships to be a “process” or “state.” For instance, Hinde (1988) and Laumann et al. (1978) deemed relationships as a process, and the works of scholars such as Duck (1973, 1986), Kerns (1994), and Klir (1991) refer relationship to be a state. On the other hand, scholars such as Anderson (1993) and Oliver (1990) consider relationship to be both a process and a state.

Chinese scholars’ definition of “relationships” also covered the concepts of state, process, and subjectivity (Chiao, 1982; Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000). Specifically, Chiao (1982) defined relationships as “the state of interactions and inter-influences between one or more individuals or groups in which one of the individuals exerts influence over one or more of the other individuals or groups” (p.345). Essentially, several characteristics are involved in Chiao’s definition of relationship: 1) self-centeredness - a relationship is “egocentric,” and this “ego” may exist through one person or a group of people; 2) dynamism - a relationship is an active endeavor; and 3) ongoing exchange - a relationship constantly interacts with other “self egocentricisms” to establish an inter-connected network.

Cheng (1996) classified relationships from the perspective of subjectivity and objectivity. Cheng’s theory postulates that the meaning of relationship in Chinese has at least two aspects: 1) Objective *guanxi*, which means that people have similar backgrounds or have a shared past experience; and 2) subjective *guanxi*, which means the degree of closeness between two individuals or parties. In a similar vein, Tzo (2000) emphasized the characteristics of relationship mobility and variability, stating that relationship does not go unchanged in Chinese culture. On the contrary, relationships will evolve over time and are ever-changing within the external environment.

Divergent Views. In contrast to the similar views between Eastern and Western cultures that perceive relationship as subjective and objective realities and a state or process, the Chinese definitions of relationships are more complicated and broad. The following three definitions particularly reflect

Chinese indigenous perspectives. The first such view defines relationship as interpersonal ethics, which refers to a static social structure of interpersonal relationships (Farth, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998; Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000). In traditional Chinese society, there are five basic interpersonal relationships or interpersonal ethics that define human relations, called *wu-lun* (Chen & Chung, 1994) or the Five Cardinal Relations of Confucian ethics - the relations between sovereign and subordinate, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. The other relationships between people in Chinese culture involve those evidently reflected through classmates, co-workers, colleagues, people of similar status, comrades, schoolmates, people from the same home-town, etc.

The second indigenous definition of relationship amounts to “resources” (Hsu & Saxenian, 2000). Hwang (1985) clearly pointed out that a “relationship” is akin to a resource and in this instance, may be considered as a favor. Peng (1989) held a similar approach and considered relationship as a mixture of favors, customs, tools, and interests. Within the context of being a resource, Tzo (2000) postulated that a Chinese relationship is cumulative in nature and, over the course of time, the relationship tends to become stable.

The third notion regarding relationships from a Chinese perspective is a “favor” or a “privilege”. Bond and Hwang (1986) highlighted that *guanxi* is a term used to denote particularistic ties in China. Likewise, Chen and Kao (1991) wrote that relationships are a special channel or an access to privilege. In essence, this special channel is not easily owned or controlled by any individual or group. Moreover, such a privilege is dynamic as it is heavily dependent upon the strength and scale of the individuals’ or groups’ power and influence. Chang (1994) noted that the norm of reciprocity in human relationship is expressed in the Chinese concept of *pao* and its related social resources, social mechanism and human emotional debt.

In summary, the concept, essence, and definition of “relationship” display both cultural universality and speciality between Chinese and Western cultures. If the angles of subjective and objective characteristics of relationship and views of relationship as a situation or process are adopted, then the conceptualization of “relationship” represents cultural universality. On the other hand, if the culturally specific aspect is adopted, then relationship in Chinese culture tends to be defined as resource, favor, and special channel to “privilege” and it thus demonstrates cultural specificity, which are research directions worthy of further exploration.

The Theory of Chinese Relationalism and the Challenges Facing Chinese Relationalism

Grounded on the understanding that discrepant definitions of relationship exist between Chinese and Eastern cultures and that there is lack of intercultural relationship studies in the existing literature, the theory of Chinese Relationalism is explored as a conduit of discussion. The theory of Relational Orientation is illuminating and pertinent, because of its indigenous nature in one aspect, and its sound theoretical base in another. Given the theoretical pertinence, it also faces various challenges from the trends of westernization and globalization. The theory will be first discussed, followed by the challenges it faces.

The Theory of Chinese Relationalism

Taking indigenesness as the core, over the past two decades the Indigenous Psychology Research Center of National Taiwan University has worked to develop a framework of Chinese indigenous psychology (Hwang, 1995, 1999a; Yang, 1981, 1998; Ho, 1998). Hwang (2000) dubbed this body of knowledge Chinese Relationalism. Such studies are based on analyses of Confucian traditions in order to explore the phenomena of relationships in Chinese society. Pertinent theories include Differential Order (Fei, 1948), Relational Orientation (Ho, 1998), Social Orientation (Yang, 1981, 1995; Yang, 1992), Model of Face and Favor (Hwang, 1987), Model of Conflicts (Hwang, 1997), and a series of research related to the concept of face (Zhu, 1987, 1991; Chou & Ho, 1992).

In the theories of Chinese Relationalism, Yang's theory of Relational Orientation is particularly pertinent to the subject of intercultural relationship. Yang (1992) stressed five core concepts representing Relational Orientation in Chinese society, which provide knowledge for a better understanding of intercultural relationship from a Chinese perspective.

First, *relational fatalism* notes the Chinese people's concepts of karma. It emphasizes that, prior to the inception of a relationship, karma dictates the occurrence of certain patterns of interpersonal relationships and even "the duration and outcomes of such a relationship."

Secondly, *relational determinism* refers to the characteristics of the degree of intimacy in Differential Order (Yang, 1992). Such characteristics categorize interpersonal or social relationships into relationships with family members, acquaintances, and strangers (Hwang, 1987). Differential Order also dictates how a person deals with others and the affairs related to others.

Thirdly, *relational role assumption* refers to the phenomena that interpersonal interactions primarily hinge on roles assumed in a given

relationship, in which roles and related behaviors to a great extent are pre-designated and fixed, e.g., the Five Cardinal Relations, the related roles, and corresponding behaviors (Yang, 1992, p.98).

Fourthly, *relational interdependence* (reciprocity) notes that corresponding roles in social relationships are supplementary and reciprocal. Basically, they are not on equal ground; as a result, “they become interdependent” (Yang, 1992, p.101). Yang maintained that reward is the concept closest associated with reciprocity and interdependence, and that the implementation of a reward system employs “face” and “favor,” which are important resources in social exchanges in the traditional society. Yang (1992) noted the characteristics of “face” and “favor” that: 1) operate in interpersonal relationship networks, 2) increase and decrease in quantity, 3) can be deposited, overdrawn, or owned on credit, 4) can be given away and taken back, and 5) are transferable and can be rendered to third parties (p.102). Yang further stressed that the maneuvers of “favor” are primarily in non-family relationships, and those of “face” are in both family and non-family relationships.

Fifthly, *relational harmony* stresses that harmony and naturalness are pursued in interactions amongst the Chinese people. Yang noted that traditional Chinese people pursued interpersonal harmony to an extent of “harmony for the sake of harmony,” and that there are even cases of “anxiety about disharmony” and “fear of conflicts” (p.103).

The Challenges of Chinese Relationalism

These Confucianism-based theories do face a number of challenges from globalization and modernization of the Chinese society in the 21st century (Yang, 1994; Huang, 2000). On the one hand, public relations or communication management as a profession and occupation stems from Western society, while on the other hand, as suggested in Huang (2000), the traditional collectivistic aspect and social orientation in Chinese societies are being impacted by individualistic standards from the West, and that the process of globalization is witnessing emerging influences from professional relations (vis-à-vis interpersonal relationships) and professional ethics (vis-à-vis Confucian ethics) at workplaces in Taiwan. Specifically, the challenges faced when Chinese Relationalism is applied to the organization-public relationships within contemporary Chinese society are discussed from the following three aspects (Huang, 2001c; Huang, 2003).

Self-other Relational orientation: Western Individualistic Orientation vs. Eastern Relational Orientation. Relational orientation refers to the ways in which an individual relates himself (herself) to a larger group as a member in various relationships. Cross-cultural psychologists maintain that people in individualistic and collective cultures hold different relational orientations.

Hofstede (1980) noted that individualism defines self-other relationships from an “individuality perspective,” which maintains an intimate self-family relation while keeping an ordinary self-other relation. On the hand, under collectivism, self is defined from a group perspective to emphasize identification with families, parties, and organizations.

Huang’s (2003) theory used individualistic- and collectivist- cultural syndromes as analytical frameworks in order to cross-culturally compare the Western and Eastern views about self-other relational orientations. Huang (2003) explored the topic from four aspects (as follows), which shed light on the challenge faced by the theory of Chinese Relationalism in regards to different perspectives of viewing relationship between individualistic and collectivist cultures (Table 1).

The first aspect concerns self, identity, and role of organizational setting. Huang (2003) maintained that for people in collectivist societies, the self and identity in the organizational setting can be characterized as a social-relational self (Yang, 2002), interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and with a social-relational identity. By contrast, the self in an individualistic society tends to be an individualistic self, dependent self, and with personal identity.

The second aspect is centered on a psychological boundary porosity between self and organization. Huang (2003) noted that in collectivistic cultures, boundary permeability between the self and the organization can be characterized as high self-transcendence, high permeability, high self-group fusion, and low differentiation, in contrast to low self-transcendence, low permeability, low self-group fusion, and high differentiation in individualistic culture. With respect to the nature of porosity, it can be described as informal and familistic in nature in a collectivistic syndrome, and formal and contractual in nature in an individualistic syndrome.

The third aspect refers to boundary ties and porosity between an organization and stakeholders. Huang (2003) wrote that the boundary ties in individualistic cultures appear in various patterns in terms of units and level of analysis, in contrast to those in collectivist cultures, which remain mainly at the level of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, in collectivistic cultures, personal and public relationships often overlap, with a sharp distinction between in-group and out-group. By contrast, compared with collectivistic cultures, in an individualistic culture, personal and public relationships overlap to a greater extent, and there is less distinction between in-group and out-group.

TABLE 1: The Comparison of Boundary Features Based on Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures

		<i>Collectivism</i>	<i>Individualism</i>
Self, Identity, and Role in the Organizational Setting	Self	Social-relational self Interdependent self	Individualistic self Dependent self
	Identity	Social-relational identity	Personal identity
	Role	Social-relational role	Personal role
	Primacy	Organizational (Group) interest	Personal interest
Psychological Boundary Porosity between Self and Organization	Self transcendence	High Self-transcendence; Psychological inter-dependence;	Low self-transcendence; Psychological independence
	Self-group fusion	Permeable and flexible, Low differentiation	Firm or even rigid, High differentiation
	Nature of Porosity	Informal and familistic in nature	Formal and contractual in nature
Boundary Ties and Porosity between an Organization and its Stakeholders	Unit	Collectivity	Self
	Level and Formality of permeability	Interpersonal level Informal permeability	Professional level Formal/contractual permeability
	Private vs public relations	Personal and public relationships often overlap	Personal and public relationships are often separate
	In-out group distinction	Sharp distinction between in-group and out-group	In-group and out-group distinction is not as sharp
Norms of Interaction Relationships and Reciprocity	Orientation	Harmony orientation	Goal orientation
	Relationship Orientation	Continuous relation	Transactional relation
	Reciprocity	Obligatory	Non-obligatory
	Permanency of the tie	Psychologically permanent	Psychologically temporary
	Nature of the relationship	Mostly informal and personal in nature	Mostly contractual and professional in nature
	Relationship ethics	Interpersonal ethics	Professional codes of ethics

Situational vs absolute ethics	Situational ethics Particularism	Absolute ethics Universalism
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Note: Adapted from Huang (2003).

The fourth and last aspect is in regards to the norms of boundaries in relationships and reciprocity. Huang (2003) pointed out that collectivistic syndromes can be characterized as having a harmonious and psychological permanency orientation, with an obligatory orientation toward reciprocity. Interpersonal ethics and situational norms apply in collectivism cultures. In individualistic cultures, the norms of boundary relationships can be described by goal orientation, contractual orientation, and as psychologically temporary in the tie. Furthermore, professional norms and universal ethics apply to individualistic cultures.

In summary, these cross-cultural comparisons involving self-other relational orientation explain why overseas Chinese organizations' internal efficiency is high (Chen & Chung, 1994; Redding & Wong, 1986). These cross-cultural factors also illuminate the prevalence of the personal influence model in inter-organizational relations and public relations in Far Eastern countries (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang and Lyra, 1995; Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki, 1999). Moreover, the cross-cultural comparison sheds light on the challenges that could result from the cultural differences that an individual from a different culture orients differently his (her) relations with others, or with the ones in and out of organizations.

The Units of Interaction within Relationships: Western Organization-public relationship Compared To Eastern Interpersonal Relationships. As previously mentioned, Confucius' Five Cardinal Relations set rules for interpersonal relationships, but did not specify organization-public relationship.

Westernization and globalization bring in the Western system of organizations and their challenges to contemporary Chinese society. In response to the social relationships beyond the *wu-lun* or the Five Cardinal Relations, Yang (1992) noted that Chinese people adopt familism in families and pan-familism outside families. Yang (1992) maintained that families are the social and economic cornerstone of the traditional agricultural society as well as the sole important organization in Chinese society. For organizations outside families, the Chinese people tend to follow familism to apply the following three tenets (Yang, 1992): 1) Family structures and principles based on which families operate, 2) ethics and roles related to family hierarchy, and 3) learning of interpersonal and social skills from families. Thus, Redding and Wong (1986) revealed that in overseas Chinese organizations, "members of the organization enter with a set of values stressing familism, a wider collectivism, a sensitivity to interpersonal harmony, and a sense of social hierarchy" (p. 293). Based upon

the above discussion, a question is hereby posed: To what extent can the ethics of familism or pan-familism cope with the challenge resulting from globalization and westernization? Secondly, to what extent can these ethics cope with the intercultural challenges?

The other aspect that deserves special attention concerns the level or units in organization-public relationship. In essence, public relations practitioners serve as the function of boundary spanners for an organization, and thus it is erroneous to simply surmise the role of a boundary spanner purely from a purely personal or interpersonal level that is usually connoted from the Chinese perspective of interpersonal relationships, or purely from the level of organization that is defaulted in Western organizational systems. It should be noted that an organization-public relationship should be investigated not only from a personal level, but also from an interpersonal level, organizational level, and inter-organizational level.

Relationship Ethics: Western Professional Ethics in Contrast to Eastern Confucianism. Ethics of organization-public relations in Western culture can be characterized as absolute, universalistic, and professional, in contrast to situational, particularistic, and informal in Chinese culture (Hsu, 1989; Huang, 2000; Yum, 1988). The implication of situational and particularistic ethics in Far Eastern culture can be specifically discussed from two aspects, i.e., relationship closeness, or degree of intimacy, and relationship hierarchy, or status. Hwang's (1988) model of *face and favor* and theories of the humanness (*Ren*), righteousness (*Yi*), and propriety (*Li*) ethical systems illuminated the particularistic relationships in Chinese society. Hwang (1987) applied the model of *face and favor* and categorized interpersonal relationships into 1) expressive tie, 2) mixed tie, and 3) instrumental tie. Hwang (1999b) noted that, in the Five Cardinal Relations between father and son, husband and wife, and elder brother and younger brother work for the arrangement of interpersonal relationships within the family and belong to the expressive-tie category. The relations between friends and superior and subordinate belong to the mixed-tie category. Strangers are grouped into the instrumental-tie category. Because of the different roles in the Five Cardinal Relations, the values emphasized between these roles differ, i.e., closeness between father and son, righteousness between superior and subordinate, differentiation between husband and wife, hierarchy between elder and younger, and trustworthiness between friends.

In summary, what regulates Western ethics is professional ethics, which are of universal and absolute natures that are not contingent upon different issues, people, places, and/or time. Eastern ethics are regulated by Confucian norms associated with Relational Orientation, which amounts to situational ethics and particularistic and ethics. Due to the different normative natures, the implementation of Western professional ethics in Chinese society, or vice versa,

brings about moral and ethical issues and challenges. Hwang (1999b: 48) is specific about the dilemma of the contemporary Confucian ethics: "An individual may fully understand negative obligations of 'not to do certain things' and would not commit any unethical deed himself or herself. However, when this given individual is encountered in a situation that the other person with whom he or she has a critical relationship [for example, a family member] has committed unethical deeds, he or she would endeavor to help cover up such deeds" for the sake of needs rule (Hwang, 1987) and the priority plebeian ethics (Hwang, 1995).

Provision of Suggestions for Future Research Directions

Considering the abovementioned challenges of Chinese Relationalism as applied to intercultural organization-public relationship in contemporary workplaces, this section provides a theoretical framework that suggests future research directions. The purpose of providing such a suggestion is to construct a cross-cultural theoretical framework by factoring in an indigenous Chinese perspective of relations and by establishing discourses with relevant Western relations theories. The basic premise of this framework is that suggestions should be preceded by and rooted in a sound conceptual specification of societal cultures. Thus, the framework (Figure 1) is developed based upon the indigenous theory, i.e., Chinese Relationalism. Moreover, the framework is extended based upon a conceptual model of "Antecedents and consequences of organization-public relationships," which is originated by Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) and later revised by Huang (2001c). Cultural factors are integrated into the construction of this framework. The direction for future research in Figure 1 covers these aspects: 1) antecedent - relational orientation, 2) relational strategies, 3) relationship quality, and 4) the effect and/or consequence of relational strategy.

Antecedent: Relational Orientation

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) pointed out that social and cultural norms as well as collective perceptions and expectations are important antecedents in organization-public relationships. In response, this paper holds that the concept of relational orientation (Yang, 1992) is particularly worthy of further exploration from a Chinese perspective.

As previously discussed, a self-other relational orientation clearly distinguishes Western and Chinese views toward human interdependences and relationships. In essence, this notion not only reflects the important intercultural aspect that looks interesting to investigate, but it also sheds light on the current debates involving the literature of individualism and collectivism (referred as

IND and COL hereafter). Conceptually, the core assumptions that address the relationship between self and in-group in the theory of relational orientation particularly address the research direction suggested by Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002).

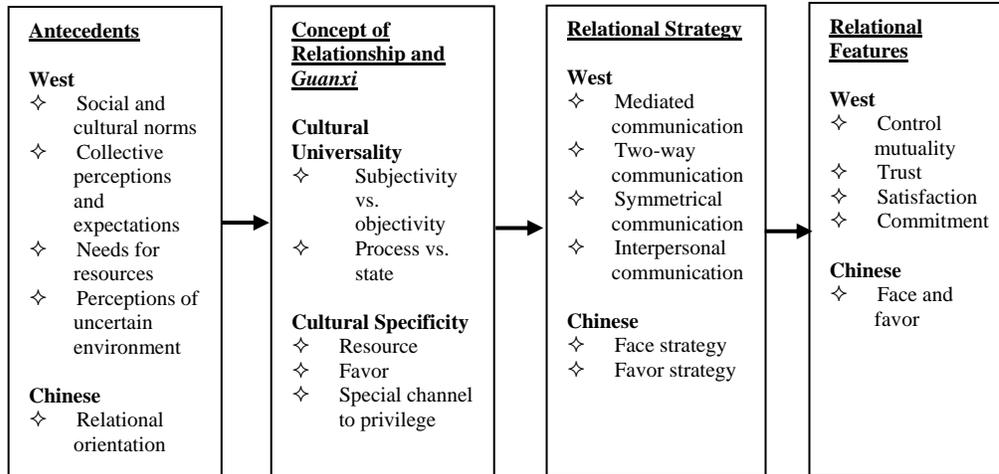


Figure 1: A Sequential Model of Intercultural Organization-public Relationships (Adapted and Extended from Broom, Casey and Ritchey, 1997 and Huang, 2001b).

Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) conducted a meta-analysis on the extant literature regarding individualism and collectivism, and have put forth criticisms on this line of research. One of the major criticisms is the broadness of definitions of the IND-COL literatures. Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) specifically pointed out:

Our main criticisms of the extant IND-COL literature are the overly broad and diffuse ways researchers define and assess these constructs and their apparent willingness to accept any cross-national differences as evidence of IND-COL processes. Low levels of consensus in definitions of IND-COL result in idiosyncratic operationalizations and assessments of these constructs.” (p.44).

Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) and Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, and Coon (2002) suggested that in order to avoid “so content packed as to be theoretically empty” in a COL framework (p.44), future research should re-focus

attention on the core elements of COL, i.e., duty to in-group and cross-nationally, maintaining harmony. Specifically, Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) stressed that the distinction of the ways that in- and our-group members are treated would be an important caveat in the IND-COL research.

In response to the aforementioned criticism on the conceptual and operational dimensions of IND-COL measurements, I suggest that relational orientation (Yang, 1992) could serve as a potentially viable dimension representing COL. The proposition is posed based upon the following reasons. First, for conceptualization, relational orientation has the advantages of greater theoretical clarity (Yang, 1992) that can serve as an active ingredient in cross-cultural differences. Secondly, the five sub-dimensions of relational orientations have the potentiality to correspond to the calls for multi-dimensionality by Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002). For example, the notions of relational role assumption and relational determinism could tap into the element of “duty to in-groups” as speculated in Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002), and relationship harmony and relational interdependence (reciprocity) to “preserving in-group harmony” (p.43). Thirdly, with the aspect of operationalization of measurement, the umbrella notion of relational orientation can be regarded as a higher-order concept (Huang, 2003) that taps the call for a single specific dimension of COL (for a relevant discussion, see Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). On the other hand, the five sub-dimensions can be treated as a multi-dimensional measurement of COL to respond to the call by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) and Triandis and Gelfand (1998).

Based upon the above discussion, relational orientation (Yang, 1992) could be studied as a core element of COL in order to distinguish cultural differences. Moreover, relational orientation also can be investigated as an antecedent variable to correlate with the other independent and dependent variables that are to be discussed later, such as relational strategy, relational characteristics, and relational effects.

Relational Strategy

Relational strategy is the second aspect worth exploring. As previously mentioned, from the perspective of cultural specificity that views relationship as a resource, and a favor and special channel to the privilege, relational strategies can be further examined from the following aspects.

First, except for the many communication-oriented strategies that are oriented from Western literature, a relational strategy is an interesting topic to explore. Huang's (2001d) empirical study demonstrated that in addition to the four “professional” public relations strategies, i.e., mediated communication, interpersonal strategies, bilateral strategies, and symmetrical communication, as all noted in Western theories, “social activity strategy” stands out as the fifth

strategy salient in the cultural dimension. To interpret the findings, Huang (2001d) noted that although the factors of *guanxi* are not an Eastern culture-exclusive phenomena, they are indispensable for the exploration of the practice of Chinese public relations in which they are frequently applied. Similarly, Huang (2000) made it clear that in such a society where relationships among parties are been hierarchically defined, the Chinese have developed a unique cultural characteristic, i.e., "*gao guanxi*" (exploit personal relations). In summary, relationship or strategy that is *guanxi*-related from a Chinese perspective is also worth further exploration.

Secondly, with respect to the specific relational strategy, the strategies of favor and face particularly should be noted. Hwang (1987) wrote that the rules of *renqing* (favor) and *mianzi* (face) are the means that people use the most to expand their human network and obtain resources from resource allocators. With regards to the strategy of face, or face-work, maintaining one's face or doing face-work in front of others is important in social interactions in Chinese societies, especially for expanding or enhancing human networks. People may "deliberately arrange the setting for social interaction, take particular care with [the person's] appearance, and behave in a specific manner, in order to shape a powerful and attractive image" (Bond & Hwang, 1986, p. 225). On the other hand, with respect to a favor strategy according to Bond and Hwang (1986), the resource allocator is "generally well advised to 'do a favor' ('*renqing*') and grant the request" (p. 225). Chiao (1982) specified the Chinese people's "*guanxi*" or favor strategies, such as tying in with remote relations, head-start relations building, coattails riding, etc. Basically, the face and favor strategies are often inter-connected. For example, Bond and Hwang (1986) maintained that the more skilled the impression management is, the more likely the resource allocator will be to accept the petitioner's request. If the allocator rejects the pleas, then the petitioner will "lose face and both sides may feel disaffected in the long run."

In summary, it is necessary to conduct systematic, conceptual and operational studies of "relational strategies" from Chinese perspectives. The following directions for research questions are worth exploring: What are intercultural relational strategies? In the practice of communication management or public relations, what are the roles of relational strategies, in contrast to professional 'communication' strategy? — A must? A supplement? A plus? Or a minus? Moreover, taking into account the challenge resulting from the different units embedded in relationships, relational strategy in an organization-public relationship should be investigated not only from a personal level, but also from an interpersonal level, organizational level, and inter-organizational level.

Relational Quality and/or Relational Characteristic

Given the understanding that relational strategy is attention-worthy, the other area worth exploring from the Chinese perspective is relational quality or relational characteristics (Chang, 2001). Relationship features or characteristics have emerged as an important paradigm in the fields of public relations (Ledingham & Brunning, 2000; Heath, 2001) and relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) in the past two decades. Several key relational features typically represent the essence of organization-public relationships. Stemming from Western literature, J. Grunig and Huang (2000) used the concept of "relationship quality" to stress the multi-dimensional presentations of the quality of organization-public relationships. Huang (2001a) further noted that the following four concepts of relationship quality are separate, but inter-correlated: 1) control mutuality that reflects the asymmetrical nature of power that organizations and publics respectively own, 2) trust and 3) satisfaction that reflect cognitive and emotional dimensions of relationships, and 4) commitment that reflects the degree of involvement of the relationship.

Taking the Chinese perspective into account, this paper suggests that face and favor be regarded as other potential indicators worth investigation. In the existing literature, in addition to the preceding four concepts based on Western literature, Huang (2001a; 2001d) adopted this fifth element of relationship quality, i.e., face and favor, and her empirical studies demonstrated that "face and favor" are important mediums for social exchange in Chinese society and they are variables that represent relational features. Possible topics that can be explored in future work include: What are the roles of "face and favor" in an intercultural relationship in general and in an organization-public relationship in particular?

The Effect and/or Consequence of Relational Strategy

Lastly, the effect and consequence of a relational strategy is another aspect worthy of in-depth exploration. Two main aspects are suggested below. The first aspect concerns the ethical or moral concerns of a relational strategy. As suggested in Chen and Chung(1994) Huang (2001d), in adhering to current trends of modernization and globalization, Taiwanese or Chinese society has been changing from a traditional agricultural type to a modern pluralistic one (Hwang, 1987). Steidlemeier (1999) investigated the double effects of gift-giving in Chinese society. Although Steidlemeier (1999) indeed explored the favorable effects of gift-giving in that people's respect for the other is critical and is manifested through "gift giving," the unethical and unfavorable effects are the major focus of discussion. Steidlemeier (1999) maintained that different forms of social activity such as gift giving could be regarded as bribery, inasmuch as "it is important to realize that the Chinese literature itself is full of

condemnations of corruption on the part of officials, where alleged 'gifts' are actually forms of extortion and bribery" (Steidlemeier, 1999, p. 124).

Under such circumstances, it becomes quite difficult to determine with certainty the answers people have to the following questions (quoted in Huang, 2001d, p.290):

When is it proper to deliver or accept a certain form of social activity? What sort of social activity is appropriate? or, what social obligations does gift giving impose? (Steidlemeier, 1999). Going a step further, a bribe, a tip, a commission, or a consulting fee might mean different things to different people. Likewise, people might have different answers to the question: Is this manner of reciprocity and resource transfer a bribe? Thus, social activity and the related concepts, i.e., face and favor, can result in both positive and negative perceptions and effects, as empirically suggested in this present study.

The second aspect suggests exploring the effects of Chinese relational strategy from broader scopes than those existing in the current research, which is particularly from an unethical or negative perspective. This paper suggests that the measures representing organizational effectiveness can be considered for measurement (Law, et al, 2000; Farth, et al., 1998). In this line of research, Huang (2001d) found out that the strategy of social activities is the most influential among five public relations strategies. Moreover, favor and face also prove to be the most effective variable among five relational features. With the specific effects, Huang (2001d) specifically noted that the strategy of social activity and the favor and face possess both positive and negative influences on organizations' resolution of conflicts with their stakeholders. Positive influence-wise, such as social activities and "favor and face" would increase the likelihood of cooperation between organizations and their stakeholders as well as mediation by third parties for conflict resolution. However, the findings also show that conflicts could escalate by using the strategy of social activities and by the exchange of face and favor.

Based upon the above discussion, Grunig's (1992) suggestion of two-way symmetrical communication leads to a direction of future research. James Grunig (1992) wrote that two-way symmetrical communication is the excellence in a public relations strategy that not only lives up to ethical and moral expectations, but also helps achieve organization effectiveness and many organization objectives. Following Grunig's argument, a question is now posed: Is relational strategy inherently unethical? Under what kind of situation is the relational strategy ethical? Under what kind of situation is the relational strategy effective? Finally, under what kind of situation is the relational strategy both effective and ethical?

Notes

1. The manuscript was developed based upon MOE Program for Promoting Academic Excellent of Universities under the grant number [89-H-FA01-2-4-6 (90-6-4)] and [89-H-FA01-2-4-2 (91-2-5)].
2. These two aspects are best described by Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997). They reviewed four academic disciplines, i.e., interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, inter-organizational relationships, and systems theory, as well as more than ten Western scholars' definitions of "relationships" and concluded that the definitions vary to a great extent. Despite such diversity, Broom et al. (1997) tried to sum up those views to note that Western scholars define "relationships" primarily from these two perspectives.

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