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## An Introduction to Key Concepts in Understanding the Chinese: Harmony as the Foundation of Chinese Communication

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## An Introduction to Key Concepts in Understanding the Chinese: Harmony as the Foundation of Chinese Communication

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# An Introduction to Key Concepts in Understanding the Chinese: Harmony as the Foundation of Chinese Communication

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**Abstract:** In addition to summarizing the content of the ten papers, this introduction paper focuses on the discussion of three issues that are related to the key concepts of Chinese communication examined in this special issue, namely, the trend of indigenous communication studies, harmony as the foundation of the paradigmatic assumptions of Chinese communication, and the pitfall of Chinese communication studies. In the conclusion, the author warns that when dealing with the localization of scholarship, scholars have to consider three directions for future research in this line of study, including culture changes over time, the potential problem of dichotomy, and the universalization of local concepts. [China Media Research. 2011; 7(4): 1-12]

**Keywords:** Key concepts, Chinese communication, harmony, indigenous scholarship, emic approach, paradigmatic assumptions

## Introduction

Two main trends have hastened the need for the world to understand Chinese communication behaviors. First, with their large population and the rapid development of economies in recent decades, Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, Mainland China, and Taiwan have formed a powerful network that affects almost every aspect of world affairs. Second, as the world is moving towards a global community, mutual understanding among people of different cultures has become an indispensable requirement for global citizens to live together peacefully and productively. Because a lack of cultural awareness and proper ways to address cultural differences will result in unrealistic expectations, frustrations, and failure in establishing a positive intercultural relationship among people of different cultures, to understand the way Chinese think and act will prove to be an important step for developing a more interdependent and peaceful future world.

The Chinese culture is represented by most people in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and numerous Chinese communities in many other nations. The People's Republic of China (PRC) in Mainland is not only the most populous nation with approximately 1.4 billion people, but also the biggest emerging power in the world. The PRC has become the fastest growing economy in the world for the past 20 years with an average annual growth rate of 10% since its open-door policy in 1979, and is emerging as one of the largest exporting countries. Given the increasingly important role Chinese people play in economic, political, and other affairs, the mutual influence and dependence between the Chinese and the rest of the world are expected to be intense in the 21st century. To better understand the Chinese is then a key to the successful co-existence among people and among nations in globalizing society.

Although communication behaviors have been studied in different disciplines, a systematic study on a

specific culture is still lacking. The efforts devoted to the study of Chinese communication are especially scarce, so far only a few books examine Chinese communication behaviors in a more systematic way (e.g., Chen, 2010; Chen & Ma, 2002; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Pye, 1982). It is the attempt of this special issue to contribute another collection of eleven more organized papers, plus a book review, to the literature of the study of Chinese communication behaviors. This collection will no doubt enrich intercultural and international communication study in general and contribute to the understanding of Chinese communication behaviors in particular. Before delineating the content of this special issue, the following sections first lay down three primary concerns regarding the study of Chinese communication behaviors, namely, the trend of indigenous communication studies, harmony as the foundation of the paradigmatic assumptions of Chinese communication, and the pitfall of Chinese communication studies. A conclusion and future direction are made to wrap up the discussion.\*

## The Trend of Indigenous Communication Studies

One of the prominent trends in academic research induced by globalization in the 1990s is the scholars' challenge, especially from the non-Western world, on the domination of Eurocentrism by raising the question of appropriateness of the Eurocentric paradigm being used in different societies. In addition to confronting Eurocentrism from a continental perspectives, such as Afrocentrism (e.g., Asante, 2007) or Asiacentrism (e.g., Chen, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Dissanayake, 1988, 2003; Miike, 2006, 2010), more and more scholars employ an emic approach to study a specific culture or area within a continent. Examples include the Japanese communication concepts of *amae* (message expanding and message accepting needs), *enryo-sasshi* (restraint-guessing), and *en* (predestined

relation) (Ishii, 1994, 1998; Kotajima, 1990, Miike, 2003); the Koreans' *uye-ri* (complementary and obligatory reciprocity) (Yum, 1987); Filipinos' *kapwa* (reciprocal being), *pahiwatig* (strategic ambiguity), and *pakiramdam* (the capacity to feel for another) (Maggay, 1993; Mendoza, 2004; Mendoza & Perkinson, 2003); and *kreng jai* (being extremely considerate) (Pornpitakpan, 2000) in Thai's communication behaviors.

As Asante (2006) pointed out, the domination of Eurocentrism is caused by the attitude of Western triumphalism, which is illustrated through aggressive individualism, chauvinistic rationalism, and ruthless culturalism and eventually leads to the challenge from scholars in non-Western areas under the impact of globalization. Chen (2009a) summarized the three aspects of Western triumphalism indicated by Asante as follows:

The aggressive individualism embedded in the Eurocentric paradigm celebrates self reliance, autonomy, independence and individual liberty, and all these tend to threaten the idea of human cooperation; the chauvinistic rationalism assumes that only Europeans have the right to define what and how to approach reality; and the ruthless culturalism promotes the European-USAmerican idea as the most correct form of human societies. This dominance of Eurocentrism eventually led to the marginalization, suppression, silence, denigration, and exclusion of other non-European paradigms. Therefore, in order to correct this problem, a culture specific approach should be adopted for the study of human communication. (p.399)

The trend of indigenizing Chinese communication studies since the early 1990s reflects the movement of de-Westernization (Wang, 2011), and can be treated as part of the efforts for the establishment of the Asiatic communication paradigm (Chen & Miike, 2003, 2006). The trend can be exemplified by the work of Chen (2004a, 2010), Wang (2010), and Wang and Chen (2010). However, as Chen (2007) and Hwang (2010) proclaimed, it is high time for Chinese scholars to build more social science theories from the Chinese culture perspective to compete with the other paradigms rather than to continue to remain in the stage of criticizing the domination of Eurocentrism or Westernization. So how do we soundly proceed to building communication theories from the Chinese culture perspective? The priority of launching this task is to first understand the paradigmatic assumptions of Chinese communication.

**Harmony as the Foundation of the Paradigmatic Assumptions of Chinese Communication**

A paradigm refers to the worldview or philosophical assumptions of a group of people. It guides the group to think, believe, and act in a specific way. Four elements of a paradigm, including ontology, axiology, epistemology, and methodology, can be used to understand human communication (Chen, Peng, Ye, & An, 2010; Smith, 1988). Ontology deals with the nature of human communication, axiology deals with the ultimate goal of human communication, epistemology deals with the way of knowing human communication, and methodology deals with the way of reaching the goal of human communication. Figure 1 summarizes the philosophical assumptions of Chinese communication (Chen & An, 2009, p. 204).

<b>Ontology</b> (Nature of human communication)		
Holistic		
submerged collectivistic		
<b>Axiology</b> (Ultimate goal)	<b>Epistemology</b> (The way of knowing)	<b>Methodology</b> (The way of reaching the goal)
Harmonious	Interconnected	Intuitive
indirect subtle adaptative consensual agreeable	reciprocity we hierarchical associative ascribed	subjective nonlinear ambiguous ritual accommodative

Figure 1. The paradigmatic assumptions of Eastern and Western cultures

Figure 1 indicates that ontologically, according to Chen (2006), Chinese culture holds a holistic view of human communication which considers the universe a great whole in which the subject and the object are mutually interpenetrated and unified, thus people tend to submerge into the group or be collectivistically oriented in the endless and transforming process of social interaction. Axiologically, the Chinese believe that harmony is not only the guidepost of regulating the never-ending process, but also the ultimate goal of human communication. The ethics of human communication, therefore, aims to achieve cooperation among interactants based on sincerity and mutuality. Displayed in daily social interaction, harmony orientation dictates an indirect, subtle, adaptive, consensual, and agreeable style of interaction. Epistemologically, the Chinese believe that the myriad becomes meaningful and perceivable only in relation to each other, thus, the interconnectedness between the knower and the known is the center of genuine knowledge. The non-dualistic reality of interrelation is mirrored in the emphasis of human communication as reciprocal, we-sense, hierarchical, associative, and ascribed. Finally, the methodological assumption of human communication in Chinese culture dictates a nonlinear cyclic approach of thinking, which refers to the method that the same destination can be reached through different paths, and these paths are woven in a web of mutually defining or complementary relationships. The nonlinear cyclic approach of Chinese thinking tends to favor a more subjective, nonlinear, ambiguous, ritual, and accommodative pattern of communication.

Although the ontological view dictates the axiological, epistemological, and methodological orientations of a group's paradigmatic thinking, the ultimate goal or the axiological assumption of interaction is the most evident aspect when we examine human communication. From the perspective of Chinese communication, it is the concept of harmony that embodies the holistic nature, interrelated connection, and intuitive way of expression of Chinese communication. In other words, all the efforts of Chinese communication aim to achieve a state of harmonious equilibrium, and the process of reaching harmony is highly dynamic (Chen, 2009b). Hence, all the key concepts included in this special issue for the understanding of Chinese communication are the functions of harmony, or the tools used to manifest harmony in the process of Chinese communication. In this sense, the concept of harmony serves as the root metaphor (Pepper, 1942), which possesses great conceptual elaborating power in understanding Chinese communication behaviors. It is, as well, an elaborating symbol denoted by Ortner (1973). As Ortner pointed out, an elaborating symbol is valued as a source of category "for conceptualizing the order of the world" of a culture or as an implying

mechanism "for successful social action" in a culture (p. 1340). Harmony as an elaborating symbol in the Chinese culture provides Chinese people cognitive and affective orientations and strategies for orderly social action embedded in the defined goal of Chinese culture.

Based on this, Chen (2001) argued that it is important to establish a scientific theory based on the concept of harmony to better understand Chinese communication behaviors. Chen first delineated the ontological assumptions of Chinese culture that serve as the foundation for generating a general theory of Chinese communication based on harmony, in which harmony could be used to conceptualize Chinese communication competence. Then nine concepts embedded in Chinese culture were extracted to form a more complete description of the harmony theory. Overall, four propositions, 23 axioms, and 23 theorems were proposed. Together the functions and interrelationships of these concepts form a holistic system that brings continuity into the endless transforming process of Chinese communication.

In the four propositions, the first three refer to ontological assumptions, and the fourth is the application of the ontological assumptions to harmony and Chinese communication. Altogether, these address the following:

1. Human communication is a changing and transforming process.
2. Human communication is changing according to the endless but orderly cycle of the universe.
3. Human communication is never absolutely completed or finished.
4. Chinese communication aims to reach a harmonious state of human relationship.

From assumption #4 Chen developed an axiom that connects harmony and Chinese communication competence: "An increase in the ability to achieve harmony in Chinese communication will increase the degree of communication competence"(Axiom #1). In order to delineate the way to achieve harmony or competence in the process of Chinese communication, Chen went one step further to pull out the nine concepts that are based on three guidelines of Chinese communication. These are to intrinsically internalize the three principles of *jen* (humanism), *yi* (righteousness), and *li* (rite); to extrinsically accommodate three components of *shih* (temporal contingencies), *wei* (spatial contingencies), and *ji* (the first imperceptible beginning of movement); and strategically to exercise three behavioral skills of *guanxi* (inter-relation), *mientz* (face), and power.

A series of axioms and theorems were then attached to each of the nine concepts, i.e., *jen* (humanism), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (rite), *shih* (temporal contingencies), *wei* (spatial contingencies), *ji* (the first imperceptible beginning of movement), *guanxi* (inter-relation), *mientz* (face), and power, as listed below (see Table 1):

Table 1. Axioms and theorems of Chinese communication

<b><i>Jen (humanism)</i></b>	
<i>Axiom 2:</i>	The higher the degree of <i>jen</i> , the higher the likelihood that harmony will be developed in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 3:</i>	The higher the degree of being humane, the higher the likelihood that <i>jen</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 1:</i>	The more reciprocal a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 2:</i>	The more empathic a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Yi (righteousness)</i></b>	
<i>Axiom 4:</i>	The higher the degree of <i>yi</i> , the higher the likelihood that harmony will be developed in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 5:</i>	The higher the degree of appropriateness, the higher the likelihood that <i>yi</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 3:</i>	The more flexible a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 4:</i>	The more adaptable a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Li (rite)</i></b>	
<i>Axiom 6:</i>	An increase of the practice of <i>li</i> will produce an increase in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 7:</i>	The higher the degree of formality, the higher the likelihood that <i>li</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 5:</i>	The more skillful a person is in managing honorific language, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 6:</i>	The more skillful a person is in dealing with the hierarchical social relations, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 7:</i>	The more polite a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 8:</i>	The more skillful a person is in controlling emotion, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 9:</i>	The less aggressive a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Shih (temporal contingencies)</i></b>	
<i>Axiom 8:</i>	An increase of knowing <i>shi</i> will produce an increase in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 9:</i>	The higher the degree of knowing temporal contingencies, the higher the likelihood that <i>shi</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 10:</i>	The more a person knows when is the appropriate time to act, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Wei (spatial contingencies)</i></b>	
<i>Axiom 10:</i>	An increase of knowing <i>wei</i> will produce an increase in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 11:</i>	The higher the degree of knowing spatial contingencies, the higher the likelihood that <i>wei</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 11:</i>	The more a person knows the communication environment, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 12:</i>	The more a person knows the social context, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.

<b><i>Ji</i> (the first imperceptible beginning of movement)</b>	
<i>Axiom 12:</i>	An increase of knowing <i>ji</i> will produce an increase in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 13:</i>	The higher the degree of knowing the trace of possible consequences of an interaction, the higher the likelihood that <i>ji</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 13:</i>	The more a person knows the trace of possible consequences of an interaction, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 14:</i>	The more sensitive a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 15:</i>	The more sincere a person is, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Guanxi</i> (inter-relation)</b>	
<i>Axiom 14:</i>	An enhancement of <i>guanxi</i> will produce an enhancement in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 15:</i>	The higher the degree of establishing particular relationships, the higher the likelihood that <i>guanxi</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 16:</i>	The more a person knows how to establish inter-relation with others, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 17:</i>	The more skillful a person is in distinguishing in-group from out-group members, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 18:</i>	The stronger the “we-feeling” a person has, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b><i>Mientz</i> (face)</b>	
<i>Axiom 16:</i>	An enhancement of <i>mientz</i> will produce an enhancement in the development of <i>guanxi</i> in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 17:</i>	An enhancement of <i>mientz</i> will produce an enhancement in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 18:</i>	The higher the degree of respect towards others, the higher the likelihood that <i>mientz</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 19:</i>	The higher the degree of <i>renqin</i> towards others, the higher the likelihood that <i>mientz</i> will be maintained in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 19:</i>	The more a person knows how to increase others’ <i>mientz</i> , the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 20:</i>	The more skillful a person is in doing a favor for others, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 21:</i>	The stronger the “indebtedness” feeling a person has, the more competent the person will be in Chinese communication.
<b>Power</b>	
<i>Axiom 20:</i>	An appropriate exertion of power will produce an enhancement in the development of harmony in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 21:</i>	An increase in <i>guanxi</i> will produce an increase in the development of power in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 22:</i>	An increase in the degree of seniority will produce an increase in the development of power in Chinese communication.
<i>Axiom 23:</i>	An increase in the degree of authority will produce an increase in the development of power in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 22:</i>	The more senior a person is, the more competent the person will be perceived in Chinese communication.
<i>Theorem 23:</i>	The more authority a person possesses, the more competent the person will be perceived in Chinese communication.

The nine concepts extracted by Chen for the development of a harmony theory are typical, but not exhaustive, key terms for the understanding of Chinese communication behaviors. Some of the concepts, in addition to harmony itself, have been frequently studied by scholars (e.g., face and inter-relation) and others are less examined. In this special issue the topics of *li* and *dengji* can be classified to Chen's category of intrinsic concepts, *yuan* and *zhan bu/xiaming* to the category of extrinsic concepts, and face, *guanxi*, *renqing*, *bao*, and *keqi* to the category of strategic concepts. As to Chung's topic of *chi*, it deals with an ontological issue of Chinese communication. In addition, this introduction paper mainly focuses on the exploration of the concept of harmony as the foundation of Chinese communication. All the subjects investigated in this special issue can no doubt be used to reinforce and supplement Chen's harmony model of Chinese communication.

### **The Pitfall of Chinese Communication Studies**

A common misperception in the study of Chinese communication behaviors is the mistreatment of harmony, being the ultimate goal of Chinese communication, as the real representation of the way Chinese interact and the state of Chinese communication. Chen (2004b) pointed out the problem by arguing that there are two faces of Chinese communication from the perspective of harmony. The argument was based on Chinese philosophical thinking and observation in actual Chinese daily interaction. Chinese philosophy dictates that, as a changing and transforming process, human communication reflects the co-existence of the two opposite but complementary forces, i.e., *yin* and *yang*. (Chen, 2008, 2009c; Fang & Faure, 2011). In human communication *yin* represents the attributes of yieldingness and submissiveness and *yang* represents unyieldingness and dominance. They form the two sides of a coin and both appear simultaneously in the process of communication with different degree of strength that leads to a symmetrical or asymmetrical situation of the interaction.

Thus, according to Chen (2004b), the first face of Chinese communication that is embedded in the concept of harmony has been engraved on the minds and hearts of Chinese people for centuries (Wright, 1953). It is the *yang* aspect of Chinese communication and refers to the state of fellowship of the interaction. In other words, it stands for the ultimate goal or the ideal state of human communication Chinese people strive for in the process of daily interaction, and it is a dynamic and never ending process of pursuing. Thus, all actions are aiming to achieve harmony, and different moral standards and guidelines for appropriate behaviors are then generated based on the concept of harmony. Abundant studies, including this special issue, have been devoted to the

understanding of Chinese communication behaviors from this aspect.

The second face of Chinese communication is echoed by the question, "What will happen if harmony cannot be upheld in interaction?" It is the *yin* aspect of Chinese communication and refers to the state of opposition of the interaction. There is no question that in this situation Chinese people will always make an effort to show *keqi* (politeness) by following the principle of *xian li hou bing*. In other words, in the initial stage of interaction, Chinese people always show courteous attitude through respect, positive reciprocity, and sincerity to build a harmonious communication climate (Xiao, 2004). If the respect rule of "Humbling oneself and giving honor to others" or the reciprocity rule is violated, Chinese people are most likely to show an aggressive behavior in order to protect their face, which will inevitably lead to a conflict situation (Chen & Xiao, 1993; Xiao, 2002).

It is obvious that the problem can often happen in the process of daily life interaction when people are competing for scarce resources or having incompatible goals. In this situation it is not uncommon to see that harmony becomes a victim in interaction through the play of "power games" between the two parties (Hwang, 1988). In a conflict situation when harmony cannot be maintained, Chinese people tend to be accustomed to a fierce and naked fighting for their own advantages. This can answer why some Westerners were wondering why occasionally they witnessed that the Chinese are direct and aggressive in expression or show raw emotion in public.

It is important to be aware of the two faces in order to learn the inconsistency or incompatibility of Chinese communication behaviors caused by the pushing and pulling of *yin* and *yang* forces. What the Chinese aim to achieve is to transform from opposition to fellowship because of their belief in the essential role of harmony playing in the process of human interaction. As Wilhelm (1979) explained, the transformation from opposition to fellowship is a difficult process in human communication, but through the process of negation, an individual can plant seeds for gemmating potential resolutions while in opposition in order to foster the capacity of adapting and cultivation of the proper attitude towards the contradiction. In a more accurate sense, this is the way Chinese believe and behave.

### **The Structure of the Special Issue**

This special issue brings together analyses from different conceptual perspectives to demystify Chinese communication behaviors. Eleven scholars from different academic disciplines and different continents participated in this project and each of them focused on the analysis of a key concept that is expected to help people better understand Chinese communication. The



eleven concepts analyzed in this special issue include harmony, face (*mientz*), social relations (*guanxi*), favor (*renqing*), reciprocity (*bao*), politeness (*keqi*), rites (*li*), predestined relation (*yuan*), hierarchy (*dengji*), *chi*, and divination/fortune telling (*zhan bu/xianming*).

In the first paper Guo-Ming Chen proposes harmony as the axiological foundation and the ultimate goal of Chinese communication right after introducing the need for better understanding Chinese people in this globalizing society and the purpose of this special issue. Chen uses the harmony model of Chinese communication as the framework that covers all the following key concepts examined by other scholars in this issue. Chen further cautions that harmony as the ultimate goal of Chinese communication cannot be directly inferred to indicate that Chinese communication is always harmonious. Instead, there are two faces or *yin* and *yang* of Chinese communication, which shows that Chinese people, in addition to being harmonious, can be very aggressive without caring about the manner of *li* or politeness when in a conflict situation in which harmony cannot be sustained. In other words, Chinese people are constantly pursuing the ideal goal of a harmonious society, but it neither denotes that the Chinese are always gentle and polite nor that Chinese society is conflict-free.

Kwang-Kuo Hwang's "From the Perspective of Confucian Relationalism" aims to explain the function of face (*mientz*) for Chinese social interaction in various types of role relationships. According to Hwang, the prototype of Chinese *mientz* dictates that a person in various dyad relationships has to fulfill one's role obligations so as to create a sense of "big self" for both parties of interaction. Extending the prototype of face interaction to the situation of group dynamics, it implies that all persons in a particular relation have to interact in accordance with politeness (*li*), especially for a group's leader. Because the performances and moral conducts of group leaders are constantly monitored by group members, the leaders must be vigilant about their speeches and acts in public, so that they can express themselves in a middle way (*zhong dao*) to maintain harmony within the group.

Ringo Ma explores the concept of *guanxi* (inter-relations/social relations) from the perspective of Chinese interpersonal communication. Ma indicates that the Chinese term *guanxi* has a range of meanings including "relationship," "relation," and "connection." Although establishing interpersonal relationships or making interpersonal connections is a universal phenomenon, the extent to which it concerns ordinary people and to which it influences business outcomes is subject to cultural variation. As a multi-dimensional social phenomenon, *guanxi* has been identified as a key element in Chinese culture. It becomes both a way of life and a tool for achieving various goals in life. Thus,

knowing how *guanxi* is conceptualized and operationalized is crucial to the understanding of Chinese communication in both interpersonal and organizational contexts. Ma's analysis based on various dimensions of *guanxi* in this paper reveals why it is more important in Chinese culture than in many others.

Yi-Hui Christine Huang discusses the concept of *renqing* (favor) in the context of Chinese corporate communication from the Confucian perspective. As Huang pointed out, in recent years legislation has been introduced in China (including Hong Kong) and Taiwan to regulate business practices in attempt to reduce the impact of *renqing* practices in business exchanges. The purpose of this paper is then to investigate the current form of *renqing* in modern-day Chinese corporate contexts as well as the implication and dynamic interrelations between Chinese traditions and their contemporary institutional contexts. The ultimate goal of this paper is to advance the theoretical development of *guanxi* communication through cross-regional comparisons.

Richard Holt treated the concept of *bao* (reciprocity) as the balancing mechanism of Chinese communication. Holt explains that *bao* highlights the Chinese as a people of balance, with good and bad deeds naturally producing their intended consequences. This philosophical attitude is also concretely realized in human interaction, thus playing an intricate role in the management of relationships. In this paper Holt first elaborates on *bao*'s cosmology and philosophical underpinnings, and then, in order to better situate it within the multiplex realm of Chinese beliefs, discusses how *bao* relates to other folk concepts such as *guanxi*, *renqingzai* (human emotional debt), and *yuan*, and how these help add to Chinese interpersonal life a heavy layer of emotion unique to relationships. Finally, Holt turns the coin by showing how, aside from its force to bring people closer, *bao* also pushes Chinese away from each other. This seeming paradoxical balance will compel scholars to reassess the long-established claim that Chinese relationships are particularistic.

Hairong Feng stipulates *keqi* (politeness) as the fragrance of Chinese communication. Feng argues that *keqi* is an alternative concept for politeness in Chinese and mainly occurs in interpersonal communication. The paper explores the Chinese concept from different perspectives. First, Feng reviews how Confucianism influences the formation and development of *keqi*, conducted through a historical analysis. Second, various strategies of performing *keqi*, including modesty, showing deference, gift-giving, and using kinship terms to address non-kin relationships, are discussed. Third, the relationship of *keqi* with other Chinese cultural concepts such as face, relationship, social distance, and power are examined. Finally, Feng discusses how the Chinese *keqi* is similar to and different from the concept of politeness in Western culture.

Xiaosui Xiao in the paper of "Rites (*Li*): The Symbolic Making of Chinese Humanity" criticizes that current studies of the Chinese system of *li*, or propriety or rites, tend to concentrate more on its ethical and political functions. The more elementary and fundamental function of *li*, that of creating symbolic meaning, has long been neglected. Xiao draws on Ernst Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms and suggests that we should view *li* as primarily a symbol using and creating activity. From this perspective, important descriptions of *li* selected from the Confucian classical texts are examined to reveal how these discourses contributed to the creation of the symbolic meaning of *li*, and how that symbolic creation, in turn, came to shape the cultural and social processes of the time. This approach to the study of *li* enables us to better understand the profound and active role that *li* has played in the making of Chinese culture and humanity.

Hui-Ching Chang deals with the concept of *yuan* (predestined relation), which refers to the passionate and the helplessness in Chinese communication. Originated from Buddhism, *yuan* has had a place in the hearts of many Chinese, not only as a convenient justification for encountering one another, but also an attitude toward life. In this paper Chang starts with an analysis of *yuan*'s philosophical and religious foundation, and then moves to address how it has transformed into a folk concept through a set of elaborate linguistic expressions, such as *youyuan*, *wuyuan*, *touyuan*, and *xiyuan*. These *yuan* expressions have exerted profound influence on Chinese relationships, whether romantic, kinship, or merely casual acquaintances, as every encounter cannot but be conceived as a manifestation of *yuan*. Central to the sense-making involved in *yuan* is the extra layer of passion to cherish union and the sense of helplessness when an encounter dissipates. Finally, Chang discusses how such a torn feeling helps redefine meanings for human interaction and also shape their philosophical attitude toward life.

Shuang Liu tackles the concept of *dengji* (hierarchy) in the organizational context, in which *dengji* symbolizes the pyramid of interconnected relationships in an organization. The paper explores the roots of hierarchy, its maintenance in modern Chinese organizations, and draws implications for managerial communication. According to Liu, in Chinese organizations a hierarchy is a relational matrix of status ranking. The collectivist Chinese culture that cultivates the interdependent sense of self also constructs a social order based on hierarchy. The respect for hierarchy dates back to Confucianism, which defines five cardinal relationships between ruler and ruled, husband and wife, parents and children, older and younger brothers, and friends. Liu continues to explain that adherence to these hierarchical relationships is expected to yield social harmony and maintain stability. In social systems like organizations, hierarchies are constituted by networks of

graded relationships that both pattern and are patterned by communication systems. Each position in the networks serves to empower or constrain the how, what, when, where and with whom an organization member can and will communicate.

Jensen Chung examines one of the Chinese ontological concepts, i.e., *chi/qi* (vital force) by analyzing how the interplay of opposites generates vital force of energy flow in communication. Chung expounds that philosophers in China and other East-Asian cultures have been familiar with Lao Tze's popular adage, "Myriad things carry *yin* and embrace *yang*, interplaying to generate *chi* (*qi*) to reach harmony." Communication studies also have in the past decade shed light on the role of communication in the *yin-yang* interaction. But exactly how opposites interact to generate *chi* (*qi*) remains to be explored. In this paper Chung reports a study on how *yin* and *yang* components in communication interact to create energy flow, which, in turn, generates vital force. However, Chung argues that the Eastern concept of *chi* is partially and fragmentally conveyed through various terms in English language, depending on the context of communication in various levels of the hierarchy of communication systems. Thus, this paper explores the *chi*-generation process by focusing on the *yin-yang* interplays in the interpersonal and the organizational communication contexts. Western communication theories, such as relational control typologies, equilibrium theories in nonverbal codes, two-concern conflict management model, message taxonomy, and structuration theory are brought in to facilitate the understanding of such a process.

Finally, Rueyling Chuang enters the spiritual zone of Chinese communication by searching into the concept of *zhan bu/xianming* (divination/fortune telling), which displays Chinese cultural praxis and worldview. Chuang states that being a prevalent form of cultural communication, *zhan bu* embodies the life world of many Chinese and reflects their cultural values. Since Chinese are not into asking psychological help from a professional, *zhan bu* or fortune telling then serves as psychiatric counseling for those people who are physically or emotionally in turmoil. *Zhan bu* is deeply imbedded in Chinese culture and their way of life. This paper adopts a phenomenological perspective to investigate the meaning Chinese people attach to *zhan bu* (divination) and how it relates to Chinese life world. Divination makes predictions, so uncertainty of one's future can be reduced. It creates a sense of security when positive predictions are made or issues an early warning, so that preventive measures can be taken. It also serves two important communicative functions: psychological counseling and supplying a popular topic for conversation. In addition, it is a reflection of Chinese philosophy, tradition and a ritual in many Chinese interactions. This paper addresses spiritual underpinnings

and intercultural implications of divination and fortune telling. Using fortune telling as an example, Chuang illustrates the extent to which fortune telling exemplifies Chinese cosmology, cultural traditions and worldview.

In addition to the eleven concepts examined in this special issue, a book review by Pei-Wen Lee is also included. The piece reviews Guo-Ming Chen's "Study on Chinese Communication Behaviors." The book, a collection of 21 papers published by Chen, investigates Chinese communication behaviors from four perspectives, namely, conceptual explication, empirical research, theory building, and future development. Together, the book serves as a nice supplemental source that can be used to support and extend the 11 concepts dealt with in this special paper, because, as Lee points out, the book explicates the primary cultural roots that shape Chinese communication behaviors in an in-depth fashion, and it realistically presents the way Chinese people communicate without only mentioning the positive sides.

#### **Conclusion and Future Direction**

It is encouraging that the trend for indigenous scholarship is getting strong and stronger because of the impact of globalization. This special issue is an effort to respond to the challenge of the globalizing trend by exploring key concepts of Chinese communication through an emic approach in order to help people better understand the way Chinese people think and behave. While dealing with the localization of scholarship, three issues are worth discussing for the scholars working in this line of research, i.e., culture changes over time, the potential problem of dichotomy, and the universalization of local concepts.

First, culture is dynamic. It constantly changes over time because of the impact of technological invention, natural and man-made calamity, cultural contact, and other possible environmental factors (Chen & Starosta, 2005). When culture changes, cultural values change too, which results in the alternation of the significance of key concepts previously used to represent the culture or explain the behaviors of people from the culture. Scholars must be cautious in treating culture or cultural values as a static variable in localizing the study from the indigenous perspective by closely observing the representation of the concepts during the study. For example, are the key concepts included in this special issue really typifying the contemporary Chinese culture or just reflecting the traditional Chinese cultural values? It is legitimate for one to question the contemporary representation of these key concepts or the possible transformation of the meanings of these key concepts in different ages.

Second, the tendency of dichotomizing culture is a common problem in the research community, especially in the study of intercultural communication. Figure 2 uses axiological assumptions to show the dichotomized

problem. Chen (2009a) argued that a potential pitfall of dichotomizing culture stems from the attempt to localize the intellectual inquiry by overemphasizing the necessity of employing the culture specific or emic approach to the study of human communication. The dichotomy problem is displayed in three modes: the indiscriminant treatment of cultural values, the insider's privilege, and the blind acceptance or rejection of foreign elements. According to Chen:

First, scholars tend to treat cultural values in an indiscriminant way. For example, most researchers blindly treat Chinese as being collectivistic and US Americans as being individualistic without considering the internal variations of a culture.... Second, the tendency of dichotomizing cultural value orientations misleads some scholars to argue that only the insiders have the ability or privilege to know their own culture, and therefore, for example, only a Chinese scholar has the right or insight to study the Chinese.... Finally and worse, the dichotomizing problem splits the scholars' position in facing the contribution or challenge of the results of intellectual inquiry from the outside world. On the one end, scholars blindly embrace, for example, the Eurocentric paradigm, or fully reject it on the other end. (p. 402)

Chen further stipulates that a more appropriate attitude is to treat culture values as a continuum in which each culture or society tends to orient more to one end and show less emphasis on the other end. In other words, the Chinese may be more collectivistic oriented, but that doesn't infer that there is no individualism existing in Chinese society. It can only infer that Chinese people tend to be less individualistic in interaction. It is a more or less rather than an either-or situation. Moreover, the argument that only local scholars have the ability to know their own culture is not warranted, because an outsider may see what an insider cannot see about their culture due to the limitation of the worldview. As to the problem of the blind acceptance or the sheer rejection of foreign elements, it is just an irrational or ignorant expression, because while each culture or society is unique by itself, human society is not an isolated island, thus the commonality of cultural values is not uncommon. All these demonstrate that the gap of cultural values among different cultures should not be a discrete or insurmountable one. Applied to this special issue, we may ask: Are all the key concepts used to explain Chinese communication behaviors solely belonging to Chinese culture? The answer should be no, because the concepts are as well reflected in the communication behaviors of people from other societies, only with the difference of the degree of emphasis.

<b>Axiology</b>		
Harmonious (Chinese)		Confrontational (USAmericans)
indirect	← →	direct
subtle	← →	expressive
adaptative	← →	dialectical
consensual	← →	divisive
agreeable	← →	sermonic

Figure 2. The dichotomy of axiological assumptions between Chinese and USAmericans

Lastly, the commonality of cultural values in different societies provides a possibility or represents an ideal goal of indigenous scholarship for the establishment of a global or universal model of human communication. A group of scholars in psychology have contended that the ultimate goal of developing indigenous psychology is to help produce a global or universal psychology (e.g., Berry & Kim, 1993; Enriquez, 1993; Ho, 1988). As Poortinga (1999) claimed, people in different societies should possess identical psychological functionings. However, unfortunately, intercultural scholars tend to treat culture as a stable system and overemphasize the differences of specific contents of psychology in different cultures. This oversight of the invariance in psychological functioning in different cultures often leads to factual incorrectness and theoretical misleading. Hence, on the basis of the existence of the identical deep structure of human cultures, Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus, and Miller (1998) proposed the idea of “one mind, many mentalities; universalism without uniformity” (p. 871) to serve as the principle of the inquiry of indigenous scholarship. The argument supplies a great opportunity for scholars to elaborate on what are the universal psychological or interactional functionings behind these Chinese key concepts, and if the universal function behind the concepts can be identified, then how can a global or universal model of human communication be developed in order to better understand not only Chinese people but also people in different societies, and to enrich the literature in this line of research.

\* The points regarding the three primary concerns and the three issues discussed in the conclusion part were mainly drawn from Chen (2001, 2004b, 2006, 2009a) and Chen & An (2009).

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