

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Codes of Politeness in the Chinese Workplace

A Focus on Some Major Components and Practices of Politeness in Chinese Business Culture

Auteur : Chun-Ling Céline Yeh

Promoteur : Sylvie De Cock

Année académique 2018-2019

Master en communication multilingue à finalité spécialisée en langues des affaires

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ABSTRACT

Politeness has always been part of each culture and society and has been expressed through various means following different cultural norms. Cultural differences can lead to various misunderstandings and communicative difficulties during intercultural interactions. In a business context, codes of politeness are therefore essential to understand and learn in order to do business successfully with business partners from all over the world. This dissertation aims at identifying some codes of politeness in the Chinese workplace through different comparisons between various types of sources, including scientific and non-scientific sources such as books, articles, online blogs and tools, along with an online survey conducted among Chinese people currently working in China. This method allows verifying the validity of the statements made by the different sources analysed in the theoretical part by comparing them with the results of the survey, which, to a certain extent, reflect the current Chinese business practices in today's China.

La politesse a toujours fait partie de chaque culture et société et est exprimée au travers de divers moyens respectant différentes règles culturelles. Les différences culturelles peuvent mener à divers malentendus et difficultés de communication lors d'interactions interculturelles. Dans un contexte commercial, les codes de politesse sont donc essentiels à comprendre et à apprendre afin de faire affaire avec succès avec des partenaires commerciaux du monde entier. Le but de ce mémoire est d'identifier des codes de politesse dans les entreprises chinoises au travers de différentes comparaisons entre divers types de sources, incluant des sources scientifiques et non-scientifiques telles que des livres, des articles, des blogs et des outils en ligne, ainsi qu'une enquête en ligne menée auprès de Chinois travaillant actuellement en Chine. Cette méthodologie permet de vérifier l'exactitude des affirmations faites par les différentes sources analysées dans la partie théorique en les comparant avec les résultats de l'enquête qui, dans une certaine mesure, reflète les pratiques chinoises courantes au sein de la Chine actuelle.

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INTRODUCTION

Politeness has always held an important place in societies and varies according to specific cultures. The beliefs and values of a community influence and shape the mentalities, customs, behaviours and actions of individuals. People are brought up in communities that make them accustomed to certain ways of behaving and doing things, which can be different for others living in a different culture. Thus, cultural differences include differences in habits and rules in communication between cultures (Yin, *Cultural Differences of Politeness in English and Chinese*, 2009, p. 154). Those differences can lead to some misunderstandings or communicative difficulties in some situations or contexts such as in formal or business environments. Some ways of acting, speaking and behaving can be considered as rude or inappropriate for some people, whereas for others, they can be considered as common and appropriate. Moreover, politeness can also be related to relationships between individuals. Depending on the nature of the relationship and social distance, the degree of politeness can change. A great number of factors influence therefore the use of politeness in everyday life.

This dissertation aims at analysing codes of politeness specifically in Chinese business environments. It will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will begin with an analysis of politeness with a linguistic approach, based on Brown and Levinson's work on politeness (1987) and other scientific books and articles, to define various notions and concepts related to politeness. The following part of this chapter will focus on the variation of politeness according to cultures. It will then analyse Chinese culture and mentality, the importance of relationships ('guanxi'), the importance of notions of 'face' and 'self' and, finally, politeness in China.

The second chapter will be devoted to some comparisons between scientific articles and books and non-scientific sources including informal blogs and online articles. The purpose is to analyse the Chinese mentality, stereotypes and politeness in a business context and compare the recommendations given in the publications under study to find the similarities and differences.

The practical part includes the last two chapters which will mainly analyse and discuss the results of an online survey that was conducted among employees from Chinese companies located in China. The aim will be to analyse and compare the data collected in the theoretical part of this dissertation with the new data obtained from the survey in order to answer the following research questions:

1. *What are the major components in Chinese business culture that significantly influence politeness in the Chinese workplace?*
2. *How is politeness manifested in daily operations in the Chinese workplace?*

An online survey was designed and administered. It includes specific questions related to the main topics covered in the theoretical part. The results of the survey will then be discussed by means of the two research questions in order to formulate an answer to each of them.

THEORETICAL PART

CHAPTER 1 – POLITENESS

1.1. Definitions

The concept of politeness is present in all social activities of everyday life and distinguishes individuals from each other. Politeness is considered as part of human culture and society. It can be defined as “behaviour towards other people in a pleasant way that follows all the usual rules of society” (MacMillan Dictionary, n.d.) or as “good manners and respect for the feelings of others” (Oxford, 2015). Politeness has been associated with good manners and constituted an important socialisation practice (Válková, 2018, pp. 93-84). Different forms of politeness exist and can be expressed towards other individuals by means of various communicative mechanisms (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Every individual learns to communicate and act properly and politely with one another mostly under parental and social pressure. Consequently, respecting and conforming to social rules help to be accepted by others and integrated in society. On the contrary, not conforming to them can involve punishments and/or social rejection.

1.1.1. Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Politeness

Politeness can be divided into two categories: linguistic politeness and non-linguistic politeness. Linguistic politeness refers to “a scientific conceptualisation of the social phenomenon of politeness” (Válková, 2018, p. 84), which is related to language and can be expressed through different channels of communication. Whereas non-linguistic politeness refers to “politeness as an everyday concept” (Válková, 2018, p. 84), which is expressed mainly through non-verbal communication and behaviour and is related to social and contextual factors.

Non-verbal or non-linguistic behaviour is very subtle and is usually used in order to communicate thoughts and feelings that cannot be communicated verbally. Those kinds of behaviours often convey the intended meaning of a statement and allow the speaker to hint at, imply or suggest some implicit information through various facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice, for example. In other words, using non-linguistic cues help to facilitate understanding the implicit message of a statement (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996). Moreover, according to Goffman (1967), the interpretation of polite utterances depends on both its

semantic content and the non-verbal communication that accompanies the utterance and helps to contextualise it. Sometimes the verbal and non-verbal meanings can differ from each other. Both meanings are then important to understand in order to fully understand the messages.

Linguistic politeness has been discussed in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987). According to them, politeness is achieved through the protection of social interactants' 'face', which is defined as public self-image (Brunet, Cowie, Hastings, & Douglas-Cowie, 2012, p. 448).

1.1.2. Positive and Negative Face

The concept of politeness involves the notion of 'face'. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), 'face' is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 61-62). Each individual is aware of others' desires and tries to satisfy them in the interest of everyone. The notion of 'face' can then be either respected as an unquestionable value or norm, or ignored in certain contexts such as social breakdown, urgent cooperation or for efficiency. 'Face' is emotionally invested and can be lost, maintained or enhanced through different speech acts. However, individuals usually cooperate in order to maintain 'face' in interaction with others, as there is a mutual vulnerability of 'face' in each interaction. Every individual tends to maintain others' 'face' and defend their own 'face' if threatened. Therefore, it is in every participant's best interest to cooperate in maintaining social harmony in communication.

The notion of 'face' can be divided into two different aspects: 'positive face' and 'negative face'. Positive face is defined as "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). It is the desire of an individual to be desirable to some others. By contrast, negative face is defined as "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). It is the desire of one's actions to be unimpeded by others. In other words, positive face refers to the desire to be accorded prestige and goodwill from other people, making one's public self-image or personality desirable to others, whereas negative face refers to the desire to be free from imposition, defending one's own territory from the encroachments of others (St. André, 2013, pp. 76-77).

1.1.3. Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)

There are various types of acts that can threaten one's 'face'. Those acts are performed by means of verbal and non-verbal communication and can be intentionally or unintentionally used. Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) can be defined as "being realised and perceived as intentionally causing 'face damage' relative to the contextualised expectations of participants" (Chang & Haugh, 2011, p. 2950). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), depending on the nature of the FTA, either the negative face or the positive face of the participants can be threatened.

One can threaten others' negative face by indicating (potentially) the intention to impede one's freedom of action. These acts involve putting some pressure on somebody in order to do or to refrain from doing an action. In this context, threats occur through "imposition concerning either 'services' (including giving time) or 'goods' (including non-material goods such as information, the expression of regard and other face payments)" (Chang & Haugh, 2011, p. 2950). On the other hand, one's positive face can also be threatened by acts that evaluate negatively or that do not take into account an aspect of the participant's positive face (e.g. criticism, contempt, accusations, insults, taboos, unwillingness to cooperate).

For Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 68-71), face threats are a consequence of behaviours in interactions that are not consistent with the public self-image of individuals. They identified five pragmatic superstrategies, each with specific output features:

1. *Bald on record*: Doing an act baldly without redress, which involves doing it in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way. Using a redressing action means that the action 'gives' face' to the addressee by redressing the potential face damage of the FTA that has been done on either the negative face or positive face of the person.
2. *Positive politeness*: Supporting or enhancing a person's positive face.
3. *Negative politeness*: Softening the encroachment on a person's freedom of action or freedom from imposition and thus enhancing a person's negative face.
4. *Off record*: Performing the FTA in such a way that one can avoid responsibility for performing it by using indirect requests for example.

On record: Performing the FTA with the desire to be seen to pay face.

Conventionalised indirectness: Some indirect mechanisms that are used to do an FTA can become fully conventionalised in a way that it is no longer 'off record' but 'on

record'. Moreover, by bothering to phrase his/her FTA in a conventionally indirect way, the speaker shows that he or she is aware of and honours the negative face of the listener.

5. *Don't do the FTA*: Refraining from doing the FTA.

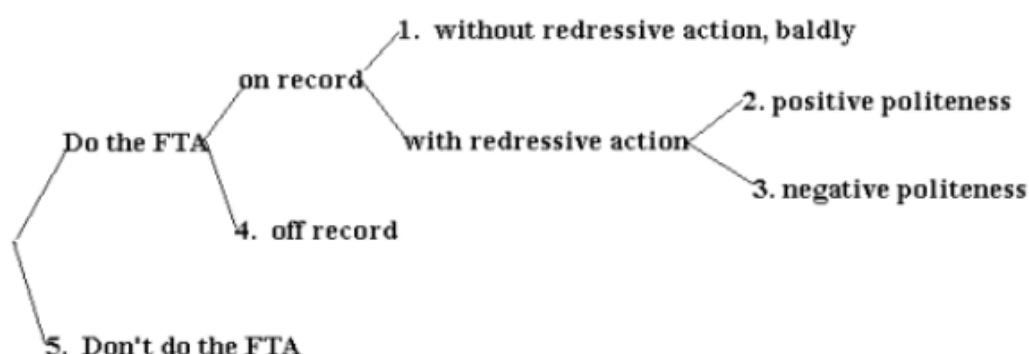


Figure 1: *Possible strategies for doing FTAs* (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69)

Different performing speech strategies can then be used to avoid or reduce FTAs, including positive politeness and negative politeness, as well as Grice's cooperative principle (cf. sections 4 and 5).

1.1.4. Positive and Negative Politeness

Positive politeness is oriented toward the positive face (self-image) of an individual. It is essentially approach-based and aims at redressing the positive face threat to the listener. In this context, speakers typically try to pay attention to the listeners' 'face' desires by being aware of his personality traits and fulfilling his needs or wants. Several strategies can be used such as complimenting, making offers, promises or treating the listener as a member of an in-group or as a friend (Bousfield, 2008, pp. 59-60) (Válková, 2018, p. 90).

On the other hand, negative politeness mostly aims at satisfying one's negative face in terms of territory and self-determination. It is essentially avoidance-based involving recognising and respecting one's negative face desires, avoiding interfering with their freedom of action and impeding their desires. A specific focus is put on directly mitigating the imposition that the FTA represents by trying to 'soften' it (Bousfield, 2008, p. 60). Negative politeness is therefore mostly characterised by self-effacement, formality and restraint, and can be performed by

means of, for instance, indirectness, using hedges or questions and apologising (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 70) (Válková, 2018, p. 90).

1.1.5. Cooperative Principle (Grice)

In his work, Grice (1975) introduced the cooperative principle according to which interlocutors tend to cooperate in interactions based on different maxims of conversation. When communicating, people are in general conversationally cooperative in order to achieve maximally efficient mutual conversational cooperation. This conversational cooperation manifests itself in a number of conversational maxims that are usually followed instinctively without realising it. Grice identifies four types of maxims that interlocutors try to adhere to in conversations:

1. *Maxim of Quality*: Telling the truth and being sincere.
2. *Maxim of Quantity*: Giving a sufficient amount of information, focusing on the essential part of the message and avoiding unnecessary information. That is, saying no less or no more than is required.
3. *Maxim of Relevance*: Being relevant and consistent with what is being said in the conversation.
4. *Maxim of Manner*: Being clear, brief and orderly, and avoiding ambiguity and obscurity of expression.

These conversational maxims are not always respected (e.g. humour, irony, lies, clash of maxims and politeness). Nevertheless, they define the basic set of assumptions underlying every communicative exchange. According to Bousfield (2008), “in conversation individuals work on the assumption that there are general expectations to interaction which will be observed by all members unless there are indications to the contrary” (Bousfield, 2008, p. 22). The maxims are assumed to be present in interaction and force the participants to do the inferential work that establishes the underlying intended message, also called ‘implicature’. That is, an inference which is generated by an assumption and that the listeners have to interpret properly in order to understand the intended message (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 95). For example, if a person A asks to a person B “–Excuse me, do you know what time it is?”, the person A assumes that the person B will give him the current time.

1.1.6. Social Distance, Power, and Imposition

The politeness strategies that individuals use depend on the nature and context of the social relationship between the interlocutors. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 77) estimate the degree of seriousness and weightiness of face threats based on three key variables: (1) the perceived social distance between the speaker and the listener, (2) the perceived power difference between them, and (3) the degree of imposition of the speech act depending on cultural ranking. The latter is defined as the degree to which the FTA is considered to be threatening depending on specific cultures (Vilkkil, 2006, p. 324).

Politeness theory suggests that interlocutors are inclined to be more polite when there is a significant social distance between the listener and the speaker, when the listener has more power over the speaker, and when there is a higher degree of imposition on the listener. For example, individuals tend to be more polite to somebody who is more socially distant (e.g. a stranger), while they tend to be less polite to somebody who is more socially close (e.g. a family member). By contrast, interlocutors are less polite when the social distance, the power and the degree of imposition are less considerable (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996, pp. 996-997). They use higher or lower level superstrategies depending on the level of social distance, power and imposition.

Within a hierarchy setting, both power and social distance define interpersonal interactions. Individuals who are at the same level within a hierarchy tend to have more similar experiences, act more familiarly with each other and interact more informally with one another. Consequently, politeness is expected to be used more frequently with superiors and subordinates rather than with peers (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996, p. 998). When dealing with face threatening information (e.g. to communicate bad news), more politeness is required when the power of the listener is higher than that of the speaker. Politeness thus tends to be used with a more powerful person than with a less powerful one.

1.1.7. Impoliteness

The focus of politeness research has mainly been on face threatening avoidance or reduction, while impoliteness research has focused more on deliberate or aggressive face threats through face attacks or aggravations (Chang & Haugh, 2011).

Impoliteness can be defined as “communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive” (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). According to Culpeper et al. (2008), impoliteness cannot be reduced to face threats as these do not include unintentional impoliteness and misinterpretations of intention. In other words, impoliteness should not be regarded as the direct opposite of politeness but rather as the ‘parasite’ of politeness (Bousfield, 2008, p. 43). Most of the time, it is considered that the concepts used to describe politeness can similarly be applied to impoliteness. However, current approaches to politeness have been unable to adequately describe impoliteness (Bousfield, 2008, p. 71).

For Bousfield (2008, pp. 72-73), the intention of the speaker/producer to offend has to be understood by the hearer/receiver in order to successfully be considered as impoliteness. It depends then on how the hearer/receiver interprets and perceives the intentions of the speaker/producer. Bousfield distinguishes four different situations in which impoliteness can be perceived as successful or unsuccessful:

- 1) *Impoliteness is successfully conveyed* when the intention of the speaker/producer to offend or damage the hearer/receiver’s ‘face’ is perceived by the latter.
- 2) *Impoliteness fails* when the intention of the speaker/producer to damage ‘face’ is not perceived by the hearer/receiver.
- 3) *Accidental face-damage* (opposed to *intentional face-damage*) occurs when the speaker/producer does not intend to damage ‘face’, but his utterance is perceived by the hearer/receiver as intentionally offending.
- 4) *Incidental face-damage* occurs when the speaker/producer does not intend to damage ‘face’, but his utterance is perceived by the hearer/receiver as unintentionally offending.

Situations 3) and 4) could be caused by various factors, such as most commonly: rudeness, the speaker/producer’s insensitivity, the hearer/receiver’s hypersensitivity, clash of expectations,

misidentification of the community of practice or activity type in which the interlocutors are engaged or cultural misunderstanding.

Just like politeness, the notion of impoliteness differs from one culture to another. As mentioned earlier, cultural differences often lead to misunderstandings between people from different cultures. Individuals from the same culture can perceive others' actions or behaviour as rude and impolite, whereas it is not necessarily the case for other people from a different culture. In interactions, impolite utterances can indicate the degree of solidarity and friendship between the interactants, as well as the status difference. However, it is important to know that there is a difference between impoliteness at the level of the individual and impoliteness at a social or cultural level. Mills (2009) claims that "impoliteness at the level of the individual can be largely analysed through examination of the types of judgement which are made about appropriacy within Community of Practice norms, and the intentions which hearers hypothesise underlie a speaker's utterances (Bousfield, 2008). However, statements about impoliteness at a social level are largely informed by stereotypes and fears about social change in general" (Mills, 2009, p. 1048). Cultural stereotypes play an essential role in what people consider polite or impolite in other cultures. Groups of individuals have stereotypes about other groups of individuals, considering their actions or behaviours as polite or impolite according to their own culture.

1.2. Politeness in Cultures

Politeness is considered as a reflection of cultural values that are present in all languages and cultures. Yin (2009) asserts that "as a universal phenomenon in societies, politeness is what people of different cultural backgrounds all try to observe for the purpose of increasing communicative competence. Being an important element in intercultural communication, politeness helps establish, maintain or consolidate harmonious interpersonal relationships, and reduces conflicts and misunderstandings" (Yin, 2009, p. 154). In other words, realisations of politeness depend on languages, cultures and societies. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 61-62) claim that the content of 'face' will differ according to cultures in order to know, for instance, the exact limits of personal territories and the publicly relevant content of personality.

1.2.1. Intracultural and Intercultural Politeness

The phenomenon of politeness pervades all activities that involve interactions with people. According to Huang (2008, p. 97), the use of politeness can occur for different purposes in various situations and contexts. It can be regarded as a social phenomenon (as people are generally aware of what is polite or not in everyday life), a means to an end to achieve good interpersonal relationships (e.g. to show good feelings, friendliness or maintain harmony) and a social norm imposed by the conventions of the community (i.e. to fulfil the conventionally recognised standards and avoid being rude or impolite). Therefore, politeness can be regarded as universal in the sense that it is a phenomenon that can be observed in all cultures and a norm in all societies. All speakers of different languages and people from different cultures are aware of politeness and realise it in various ways (Zhu & Bao, 2010, p. 850). In spite of its universality, politeness differs therefore according to cultures in terms of manifestations, use and standards of judgement (Huang, 2008, p. 97).

Culture influences politeness as it “defines what constitutes conventional and interpersonal politeness in a particular society. Culture dictates the rules and etiquette used to establish conventional politeness. Likewise, culture establishes the society’s values that are fundamental to interpersonal politeness. Without understanding someone’s values, it is difficult to properly be considerate of their feelings and understand what would insult them” (Brunet, Cowie, Donnan, & Douglas-Cowie, 2012, p. 451). For example, some gestures can be interpreted as offensive and impolite in some cultures while they have no particular meaning in other cultures. Consequently, politeness can differ between people from the same culture or from different cultures. These two phenomena are known as intracultural politeness and intercultural politeness.

Intracultural politeness is usually easier to understand and to realise as the interactants tend to have the same social rules and conventions. Sharing similar values within the same culture helps to predict and understand others’ feelings, which makes it easier for interpersonal politeness. By contrast, intercultural politeness can be more complicated and usually requires more efforts from the interactants. Being in an intercultural environment involves different social rules and conventions, which can lead to unintentionally hurting the other person’s feelings by not understanding their cultural values. Without knowing the codes of politeness of others’ culture, there are more risks to cause offence and break social rules. Therefore, the better

one knows about the other's culture, the easier it is to achieve intercultural politeness in a proper way (Brunet, Cowie, Hastings, & Douglas-Cowie, 2012).

1.2.2. Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures

Since the beginning of human history, culture has spread beyond geographical boundaries, despite natural, artificial or political borders that have been marked between countries, states, cities and villages. Thus, many cultural differences have been reflected in language, environment, social context, personal knowledge and beliefs. Physical environments and social contexts have shaped and continue to form cultural traditions such as languages, customs, behaviours, habits and mentalities. Cultural upbringing profoundly influences individuals' ways of acting and thinking and some patterns of their behaviour. Through their process of learning and adapting to their environment, different groups of people have distinctively organised the world and developed their own beliefs, values, norms, rituals and communication styles (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, p. 14). In other words, "culture defines a group of people, binds them to one another and gives them a sense of shared identity. It is how a society expresses its structure and function, its view of its physical universe, and what it regards as the proper ways to live and to treat each other. Cultural traditions go through a process of development and sedimentation, and are passed from generation to generation" (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, p. 15).

As seen earlier, politeness stays specific to cultural values which are influenced by several factors such as social, historical, geographical and other elements (Zhu & Bao, 2010, p. 848). In his *Cultural Dimensions Theory*, Hofstede (1980) broadly divides cultures into two groups: individualistic/independent cultures and collectivistic/interdependent cultures. In general, Western countries (e.g. the United States, Canada and Western Europe) are identified as individualistic countries, that is, each individual is regarded as unique and different from other people. Great importance is given to their freedom, right and independence as individuals (Huang, 2008, p. 100). In other words, individuals with an independent way of thinking tend to think more about themselves, focusing on their own goals, needs and desires. In contrast, East Asian countries (e.g. China, Japan and Korea) are usually identified as part of collectivistic cultures, which emphasise on relationships and group membership, and how one fits within a group of people. People are expected to conform to groups' norms and values and act

interdependently with others by sharing responsibility. In other words, depending on the importance given to the self-concept in a culture, individuals tend to act and behave more independently or interdependently with other people and groups. However, it would not be appropriate to classify each culture as completely individualistic or collectivistic, but rather position them along a continuum between high individualism and high collectivism (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, p. 105).

Culture can significantly influence how individuals see the world around them. People's own motivations and beliefs can sway what they see and modify the context. According to Ji and Yap (2015, p. 105), Western cultures tend to have a more cognitive style that encourages individuals to pay more attention to the focal elements of a scene. In contrast, East Asian cultures tend to have a more holistic cognitive style that makes them pay more attention to the context and the background of a scene. However, people can be interchangeably independent or interdependent regardless of their cultures, according to the context within which they are embedded. Even though differences between cultures reflect the default mindset that a given culture tends to adopt, it does not mean that there are strict cultural divisions. Independency and interdependency coexist in every individual and different way of thinking can be observed among individuals from the same cultural group. For instance, by focusing more on their interconnections with other people, individuals tend to pay more attention to context and environment. This slight change of perception of the world also works for interdependent people. If they are put into a more independent mindset, they will think in a more individualistic way (Han, 2010, pp. 280-287).

1.2.3. High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

There are differences in habits and rules between different cultures. People grow up in a community and are so accustomed to their own way of doing things and acting that other methods of achieving the same goal can be seen as wrong for them. In intercultural communication, it is a common phenomenon to see individuals of different cultural backgrounds improve their communicative skills by observing and applying politeness in order to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings and establish, maintain or consolidate harmonious relationships (Yin, 2009, p. 154).

According to Hall (1977), cultures can be divided into high-contexts and low-contexts, referring to “the extent to which we gather information from the physical, social, and psychological context of an interaction (high-context), as opposed to the explicit verbal code (low-context). This dimension represents a continuum in which some cultures (e.g. China, England, France, Ghana, Japan, Korea) orient to the high-context end, whereas others (e.g. Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, the United States) are at the low-context end” (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, p. 110).

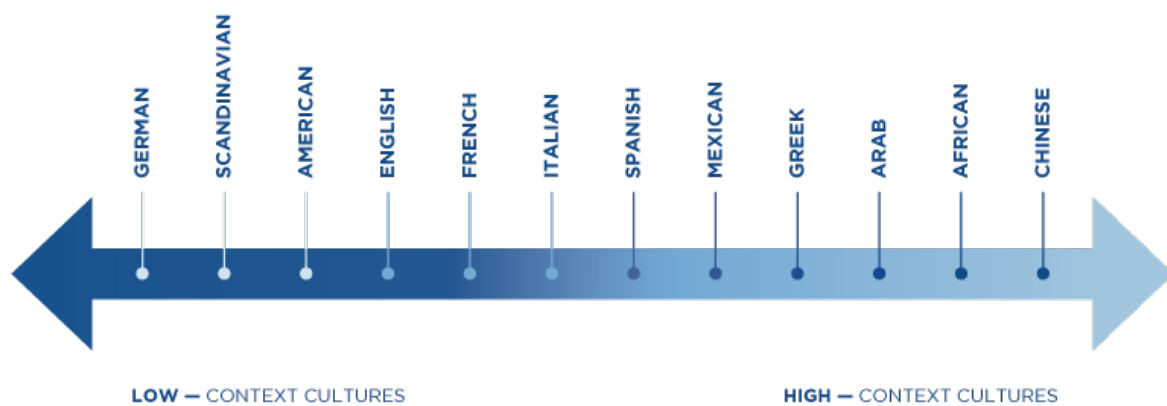


Figure 2: *Continuum of countries with high-context and low-context cultures* (Neese, 2016)

In high-context cultures, meanings are implicit in the physical environment and shared beliefs, values and norms. Information needs to be put in context in order to be properly understood. Background and procedures are usually not explicitly explained. The context plays an essential role in high-context cultures, as it constitutes a cue for behaviour. Therefore, the receivers are expected to know how to interpret information and act in consequence. Interlocutors highly refer to contextual elements during interactions and rely on the physical, social, relational, and cultural environment to share and understand information rather than focusing on the actual language (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, pp. 110-111). By contrast, in low-context cultures, people use an explicit code to communicate information. The context conveys only little meaning and does not play such an important role as in high-context cultures to properly understand the meaning of messages. Shared information, procedures and expectations are all explicitly coded and explained in the verbal message (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, *Introducing Intercultural Communication*, 2015, p. 111). There is no need to use the context to interpret information and know how to act in consequence. In other words, high-context and low-context cultures depend on the extent to which individuals rely on verbal codes or contextual codes for understanding and interpreting information. People that are part

of low-context cultures tend to think that, if they do not explicitly put their thoughts in words, they will not be understood properly or correctly. However, people from high-context cultures would tend to put less emphasis on the importance of words to communicate. Therefore, they rely on context to make their message understood properly.

The high and low-context culture contrast can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications between individuals from diverse cultures. This is even more frequent in the workplace environment. For instance, although Chinese people can get angry when they feel they have been disrespected or treated badly, they will not explicitly express their anger and hurt in words to those who offended them. By contrast, people from a low-context culture would explicitly tell if they have been hurt or offended (Beamer & Varner, 2008, pp. 34-36). “Members of low-context cultures put their thoughts into words. They tend to think that if thoughts are not in words, the thoughts will not be understood correctly or completely. When messages are in explicit words, the other side can act on them. But high-context cultures have less tendency to trust words to communicate. They rely on context to help clarify and complete the message” (Beamer & Varner, 2008, p. 35).

According to Griffith (2002), the number of people travelling across cultural and linguistic boundaries has increased with the rise of the internationalised business environment and the intensification of global competition. There is therefore a need to understand intercultural communication in order to successfully conduct business on an international level. Learning more about the other’s culture and communication styles helps bridge communication, and maintain knowledge sharing and cooperation (Lauring, 2011, pp. 231-232). In Lauring’s words (2011), “future successful international managers may be the ones that are able to manage communication in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts (see Beamer (1998), Henderson (2005), Varner & Beamer (2005))” (Lauring, 2011, p. 231).

1.3. Chinese Society

China is a country that has undergone tremendous changes in a very short period of time and that is still developing at a quick pace. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping began an ambitious programme of economic reforms aimed at expanding the Chinese economy and foreign investment in China.

These reforms led to a more market-based economy and rapid economic and social development (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 323). In a short space of time, China has become one of the world's fastest growing economies and has emerged as a major global economic and trade power (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 320). Nowadays, China is considered as the second largest economy in the world after the United States (World Bank Group, 2013, p. 3) and it plays an influential role in global economy (Ordóñez de Pablos & Lytras, 2019, p. 7). With a population of almost 1.42 billion people (Worldometers, 2019), it is also the world's largest manufacturing economy and exporter of goods (Tong, 2014, p. 133). In other words, China's economy has witnessed phenomenal growth over the past 20 years and foreign investment in the country has considerably increased allowing it to become a major overseas investor as well (Tong, 2014, p. 131).

As China has been playing a major role in global economy since the end of the 1970s, cross-cultural communication between China and Western countries has become even more necessary to build and/or sustain close business relationships with China (Tirpitz & Zhu, 2015, p. 153). However, understanding Chinese culture is not always easy and can be particularly challenging for Western countries in terms of language, ways of thinking, verbal and non-verbal communication, behaviours, rituals and traditions.

1.3.1. Chinese Culture and Mentality

Chinese culture and values have essentially been driven by a lot of philosophies and religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism. For example, Confucianism had an impact on politics, ethnicity and relationships and was used as a foundation for Chinese education for 2000 years (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 198). The popularity of Taoism influenced the Chinese behaviour in the way that the Chinese are on the whole more concerned about the means and methods rather than the end and goal (Graham & Lam, 2003, p. 84).

Modesty and self-effacement are also part of the Chinese cultural value model. The Chinese tend to avoid saying “no” outright in various situations not to be confrontational. They are more likely to change the subject or use other implicit ways to say “no”. This particularly occurs with foreign business partners, to avoid disrupting harmony. Chinese business people tend to use “maybe” as an indirect way to say “no”. However, a Westerner is more likely to interpret that

answer as a possibility, which can easily lead to confusion and misunderstanding (Liu, Volčič, & Gallois, 2015, p. 91). Furthermore, Chinese people usually try to keep a low-profile to avoid making themselves a target (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 198). In addition, “the Chinese prefer to resolve disputes and disagreements by personal contacts and negotiations rather than through judiciary system” (Ho, 2001, p. 80). Chinese business people even have a tendency to cultivate the relationships with foreign business people by using soft relationship tactics (e.g. socialising, giving gifts, informal engagement and exchanging) (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 198).

Another major component of Chinese culture is family. The Chinese family is the core of social organisation that transmits emotional and cultural values to its members (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 199). According to Yau (1994), “as for an individual, the family is a source which constantly diffuses cultural influences on him through his whole life” (1994, p. 67).

As seen before, China is associated to a high-context culture, which means that it emphasises relationships rather than the individual ‘self’. Interpersonal relationships are therefore part of Chinese business culture, in which relationships must be well built for transactions to follow (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 189).

1.3.2. The Importance of Relationships (‘Guanxi’)

The Chinese notion of relationship, or ‘guanxi’ (关系), refers to the social network that creates and establishes trust among members of a society. Each individual is born into a network of family members or other in-group members (through education, place of living, etc.) from which different kinds of relationships are built and maintained over one’s lifetime (Thomas & Liao, 2018, p. 10). As part of a collectivistic culture, Chinese people place great importance on relationships among individuals rather than the individuals themselves. Personal goals are put aside in favour of collective goals and people tend to act in accordance with the expectations of others rather than with their own (Joo Yup & Sang Hoon, 1998, p. 526). In other words, “instead of identifying themselves as separate individuals, Chinese people see themselves as part of a larger relationship net composed of complex interconnections, mutually influencing one another” (Thomas & Liao, 2018, p. 13).

The relations are usually built from kinship networks and are influenced by cultural values such as loyalty, dignity, integrity and filial devotion (e.g. obeying parents and receiving financial

support from them). In other words, Chinese ‘guanxi’ involves a long-term relationship of mutual exchange, based on trust that creates bonds between people and focused on networks and long-term alliances. Furthermore, individuals tend to also be concerned about their position (as below, above or equal to others) in a relational network. Hierarchy constitutes a crucial key element in evaluating and judging performances in social contexts (Gao, 1998, pp. 164-165) (Thomas & Liao, 2018, p. 12).

There are five cardinal relationships included in the Confucian social order: emperor-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend. People occupying the inferior role (i.e. minister, son, wife, younger brother and friend) are expected to be obedient and loyal to their relative superior (i.e. emperor, father, husband, elder brother and friend), whereas the superiors are expected to be benevolent and kind towards their relative inferior. However, in contemporary Chinese society, some relationships have become weaker over time (e.g. husband-wife) or have been transformed (e.g. from emperor-minister to leader-subordinate) even though sensitivity to social roles and the relative obligations remain quite important (e.g. supervisor-subordinate) (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002, p. 341).

1.3.3. The Importance of the Notions of ‘Face’ and ‘Self’

In classical Chinese, there are two lexical forms for ‘face’, each one with a different meaning: *lian* 臉, referring to prestige or reputation achieved by oneself or ascribed by others, and *mian(zi)* 面(子), referring to moral integrity. Both are determined and sanctioned socially and internally (Du, 2012, p. 28). The function of ‘face’ is to maintain order in groups and regulate interpersonal relationships (Thomas & Liao, 2018, p. 11).

To a certain extent, the Chinese notion of ‘face’ is similar to the Western notion of ‘face’ (cf. 1.1.2.), as both give importance to presenting positive face rather than negative face to others. However, the motivation may differ as Western countries have a culture that values autonomy and that views the ‘self’ as independent from the others, whereas Asian countries have a more collectivistic culture and conceptualise the ‘self’ within a group (Joo Yup & Sang Hoon, 1998, p. 526). As highlighted by Ji (2000), “the Chinese notion of face emphasizes not the accommodation of individual desires but the harmony of individual conduct with the views and judgements of the community” (Ji S. , 2000, p. 1060). Face behaviour requires some efforts and

self-control to adjust to interpersonal relationships and fit in with a group (Joo Yup & Sang Hoon, 1998, pp. 526-527). In addition, if an individual's 'face' is threatened, that person's social position can be called into question. A loss of 'face' can be socially devastating for the individual resulting in shame rather than embarrassment, which involves more negative emotions (Joo Yup & Sang Hoon, 1998, p. 527). Maintaining 'face' integrity is thus crucial in social interactions.

Two different types of 'face' can be identified: the 'authentic/private self' (e.g. feelings, intentions and attitudes) and the 'public self' (e.g. social status). In collectivistic cultures, the 'public self' hides the 'authentic self' that should be controlled and regulated in order not to disturb the interactions among individuals (Joo Yup & Sang Hoon, 1998, p. 526). The concerns for the relational and interdependent aspects of the 'self' affect and influence Chinese people's behaviour and self-concept. An individual's assumptions, concerns, and expectations are influenced by Chinese self-conceptions. In turn, these elements affect the way an individual speaks and relates to others in everyday social interactions (Gao, 1998, pp. 164-166). In other words, Chinese people place great importance on others. They always seek others' opinions and views and are constantly concerned with what others would say or think about them. Chinese 'face' therefore embodies a public image, rather than a personal image (Ji S. , 2000, p. 1060).

The Confucian notion of 'self' and harmonious relationships with other individuals have deeply influenced the Chinese concept of politeness (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 328): "Given that the Chinese self needs to be defined, recognized, and completed by others, seeking harmony with others and preserving peaceful relations with others becomes a primary task in a person's relational development and interpersonal communication" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 45). Harmony is a strong value in Chinese culture: it regulates social interactions and relationships between individuals of different social ranks and among peers (Chuah, Hoffmann, & Lerner, 2014, p. 1204). Chinese people try to maintain harmony in all social interactions in order to avoid conflicts and disruptions (Thomas & Liao, 2018, p. 16).

1.3.4. Politeness in China

The Chinese notion of ‘face’, relationships (‘guanxi’) and politeness are inherently related (Z. Kádár & Pan, 2012, p. 2). In Chinese culture, politeness applies to all social interactions, including all parties and individuals, which results in a process of polite interaction (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 46). Politeness can be translated as *keqi* 客气 or *limao* 礼貌 in Chinese: “Somewhat loosely, *keqi* is usually associated with polite speech and *limao* is usually associated with polite behaviour” (Hinze, 2012, p. 14). The concept of *keqi* is used by the Chinese as a basic principle in their everyday communication and can be applied differently depending on in-group or out-group contexts (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 322). According to Gu (1990), the Chinese concept of *limao* can be divided into four underlying notions: “respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth, and refinement. ‘Respectfulness’ is self’s positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the latter’s face, social status, and so on. ‘Modesty’ can be seen as another way of saying ‘self-denigration’. ‘Attitudinal warmth’ is self’s demonstration of kindness, consideration, and hospitality to other. Finally, ‘refinement’ refers to self’s behaviour to other which meets certain standards” (Gu, 1990, p. 239).

Chinese politeness gives great importance to showing respect to others (including to their ‘face’, status, reputation and feelings) to preserve the relationships with them (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 328). Respect is even more significant for authority and social order, as filial devotion has been expanded and converted to generalised respect for seniority (Chuah, Hoffmann, & Larner, 2014, p. 1204). In modern China, this is characterised by social behaviours. For example, young people show respect to older people by lowering their head or bending slightly (Fang & Faure, 2011, p. 328).

There are also other types of social behaviours that have been ritualised. An example is the Chinese host-guest relationship: the host always aims at making the guest feel comfortable and ‘at home’ and the guest returns the politeness by not imposing on the host. As a ritual, the guest would always answer “no” to any offer. This rejection would not be considered as rude but would be rather interpreted as an expression of politeness. On the other hand, the host is expected to insist until the offer is accepted by the guest. The ‘offer-decline’ ritual has become common in most Chinese host-guest interactions. However, when applied to closer relationships such as family relationships, this kind of behaviour can be interpreted as insincere or distant (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 46).

CHAPTER 2 – POLITENESS IN CHINESE BUSINESS CULTURE

2.1. Analysis of Scientific Sources

This section explores Chinese culture, mentality and politeness in a business context. The sources used in this analysis are all scientific publications. After an examination of what is discussed in non-scientific sources (e.g. ‘how to’ websites targeted at business people) in section 2.2., section 2.3. will draw a comparison of the same main elements in scientific and non-scientific sources to highlight any similarities and differences.

2.1.1. Chinese Stereotypes in Business: Culture and Mentality

In the workplace, relationships and network positions significantly influence the way Chinese people do business. The Chinese’s assumptions, expectations and behaviours are specific to Chinese business culture and impact their business relationships. As explained earlier, Chinese culture is a collectivistic culture that relies strongly on relationships. ‘Guanxi’, the reliance on personal relationships, is one of the cultural rules that mixes personal and professional relationships and determines success in private and business contexts. It facilitates business transactions, problem-solving and compromise, and influences the way business relationships are perceived by the Chinese (Tirpitz & Zhu, 2015, pp. 153-154).

According to Bradley (2002), the Chinese and Westerners view relationships differently. Western countries tend to believe that successful transactions lead to good relations, whereas the Chinese believe that transactions will follow only if a relationship is well built. Thus, in Chinese culture, business and interpersonal relationships are usually not separated from each other, as interpersonal relationships are crucial for facilitating smooth business transactions (Chee Kiong & Pit Kee, 1998, p. 76). In a business context, Chinese ‘guanxi’ emphasizes personal trust-building and the use of social bonds in dealing with partners, competitors and clients; ‘guanxi’ is an essential success factor for business performance in China. Consequently, understanding and maintaining an effective relationship with Chinese decision-makers helps to enhance business performance (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 189). “A special relationship ‘guanxi’ governs the exchange of favors. It involves a long-term relationship of mutual exchange, based on trust

which forms bonds between people, namely between buyers and sellers, manufacturers and distributors, government officials and private entrepreneurs, favoring networks and long-term alliances” (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 197).

Other cultural elements regarding ‘guanxi’ are also applied to Chinese workplaces. For example, family ethics are considered as the basis of relationships in China. Family members are considered as trustworthy regarding ownership and handling money. Thus, outsiders are usually excluded from family businesses as a Chinese business person prefers to pass on his/her business to his/her children and ensures that ownership will be passed to family members rather than an external person. This distrust for outsiders can mainly be explained by historical reasons as, for example, for most part of the history of China, the rules were made by the emperor and were subject to personal interpretation. Therefore, corruption was a big threat for businessmen who were subject to official exploitation. The general distrust can also impact trust in employees. There is a fear that employees would learn about the company, before leaving it to become business competitors. Running a family business is as a result seen as more trustworthy and less risky (Tong, 2014, p. 4).

The use of different principles in social interactions also depends on the relations an individual has with other people. Individuals tend to interact differently with certain people according to the type of relationship they have with them. For instance, a supervisor will treat his subordinates differently and divide them into two distinct groups, ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’, using loyalty as a key criterion to classify the members. The people from the ‘in-group’ will enjoy high-quality exchanges and will in return show their loyalty and share resources with their supervisor. In contrast, the people from the ‘out-group’ will perform more formal and work-related jobs and experience low-quality exchanges. These consist of exchanging favours with each other. According to Stadler (2011), “Martinsons and Westwood (1997) assert that in East Asian cultures a paternalistic relationship between employer and the employees is not uncommon, with the employee showing complete loyalty and submission, whilst the employer provides support and advice to his employees not only on work-related aspects, but on the employees’ private life as well” (Stadler, 2011, p. 119). This type of business relationship mixes the Chinese’s personal and public interests and is formed through long-term social exchange (Luo, Cheng, & Zhang, 2016, pp. 650-651).

China is considered as an indirect culture, which implies that individuals prefer to express themselves more indirectly and implicitly. For instance, they tend to indirectly stop the negotiation or not get back to the potential business partner rather than refuse an offer directly (Tirpitz & Zhu, 2015, p. 159). The Chinese also try to minimise or not raise mistakes in order to avoid public embarrassment and criticism (Osland, 1990, p. 9): “Avoiding giving the impression of disrespect or causing embarrassment, avoiding shame (sometimes referred to as *loss of face*), and preserving honor and dignity can be prime drivers of communicative behaviour by indirect communicators or within indirect cultural environments” (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003, p. 70). In China, it is seen as rude to directly confront differences of opinion. Chinese people prefer to avoid disagreeing in public or replying negatively. Instead, an affirmative answer including exceptions or suggestions is usually preferred. Indirectness is also used for all rejections of proposal, suggestion or criticism. Direct and probing questions often result in embarrassment, which should be highly avoided (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003, p. 115).

Another observation is that Chinese perception of personal space is usually much smaller than in Western countries. According to Tirpitz and Zhu (2015), Chinese people tend to get less uncomfortable or offended than Westerners if people get physically close to them and they do not feel annoyed by loud noise. However, they tend to avoid body contact such as handshakes or hugs. Thus, the perception of space and appropriate distance should be known when doing business with partners or strangers in order to avoid any misinterpretation (Tirpitz & Zhu, 2015, p. 160).

The Chinese perception of time is also different from that in Western countries as it is considered as continuous and viewed as a circle. The Chinese are very patient and do not place too much emphasis on the time a negotiation will take (Ilhéu, 2009, p. 201). Chinese people have both fixed and fluid time orientation. With a fluid time orientation, time can be used as an indirect tool for negotiating when doing business with companies that aim at completing tasks quickly. Negotiators with a more fixed time are put in a disadvantageous position due to their impatience and self-imposed time pressures. Chinese business people will wait after stating a position in the hope that the opponent or partner will make concessions. As also considered as a fixed time-oriented culture, the Chinese place great importance on punctuality and keeping to schedules. Being punctual is a way to show respect to the other people (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003, pp. 110-111).

Characteristic	Low-context/Individualistic (e.g. Western Europe, USA)	High-context/Collectivistic (e.g. Japan, China, Saudi Arabia)
Communication and Language	Explicit, direct	Implicit, indirect
Sense of Self and Space	Informal handshakes	Formal bows and handshakes
Dress and Appearance	Dress for individual success, wide variety	Indication of position in society, religious rule
Food and Eating Habits	Eating is a necessity, fast food	Eating is social event
Time Consciousness	Linear, exact, promptness is valued, time = money	Elastic, relative, time spent on enjoyment, time = relationships
Family and Friends	Nuclear family, self-oriented, value youth	Extended family, other oriented, loyalty and responsibility, respect for old age
Values and Norms	Independence, confrontation and constructive conflict	Group conformity, harmony
Beliefs and Attitudes	Egalitarian, challenge authority, individuals control destiny, gender equity	Hierarchical, respect for authority, individuals accept destiny, gender roles
Mental Process and Learning	Linear, logical sequential, problem solving	Lateral, holistic, simultaneous, accepting life's difficulties
Business/Work Habits	Deal oriented ('quickly getting down to business'), rewards based in achievement, work has value	Relationship oriented ('first you make a friend, then you make a deal'), rewards based on seniority, work is a necessity

Figure 3: *Cultural differences between high and low context cultures* (Hollensen, 2011)

2.1.2. Politeness in the Chinese Workplace

In Chinese culture, “the two main motivations for being polite are the need for (interpersonal) harmony and the importance of social relationships” (Setälä, 2007, p. 49). Chinese politeness practices in a business context can sometimes be hard to understand for Westerners. For example, Chinese people may ask personal questions during the first meeting (e.g. about one's age, family, salary, etc.) and try to avoid any negative or embarrassing subject. This type of behaviour aims at showing interest in their business partner and giving them importance (Zinzius, 2004, p. 45). It is also not uncommon to observe and experience frequent interruptions during a business meeting. The participants of a meeting can come in and out of the conference room for different reasons such as to answer a phone call or to respond to a superior's query, demand or request. Those behaviours, even in a business context, are not considered as impolite

and reflect the importance the Chinese give to relationships (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003, p. 111).

As mentioned earlier, an individual has more importance within his or her groups (e.g. family, society, company, etc.) than alone. An individual tends to behave and act according to the expectations of the group to which he or she belongs in order to fit in the group: “the way that an individual person behaves within the social relations and dependencies, within the structures of the hierarchical society, is of much higher importance. The most important factor for social face is to integrate oneself as perfectly as possible into the system and to submit personal interests to the request and expectations of the group” (Zinzius, 2004, p. 124).

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that Chinese culture is hierarchical and has great respect for age and authority (Hopkins, 2017, pp. 87-88), where age represents maturity, trustworthiness, and seniority (Osland, 1990, p. 10). Relationships and the degree of politeness between different social ranks can vary from one another. Social attributes such as age, gender and status also influence polite behaviour and practices. For instance, the differences regarding ages and status are a matter of great importance in China, as ignoring them can involve serious offence and irreparable damage in relationships. However, a lack of politeness when speaking to a person with an inferior status can be the norm under some circumstances. In certain contexts, politeness practices can even not be respected when interacting with outsiders of a group, as being polite with insiders is a cultural obligation whereas it is not with outsiders (Stadler, 2011, pp. 115-118).

2.1.3. Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be found in the scientific sources when describing Chinese culture, mentality and politeness in business settings. These recommendations are interesting to gather and analyse to see what, according to the various authors, can be done to overcome the difficulties that can be encountered when doing business in China.

Understanding and Learning About Chinese Culture

Individuals who want to successfully do business in China must observe and learn the Chinese norms, rules and behaviours. To be able to understand them, one has to understand Chinese

culture and be aware that Chinese type of business relations and communication are complicated and specific to the country's culture and mentality (Zinzius, 2004, p. 45). For example, during negotiations, it is important to adapt to the Chinese methods and take into account the negotiation tricks and tactics that are being used. Those who understand Chinese culture will be able to weigh more accurately the pros and cons of doing business in China (Osland, 1990, p. 14).

Being Patient

Negotiations are likely to exceed the deadline and must exclude any political criticism of the government. Every foreign business person who wants to do business in China should be able to deliver accurate messages and be patient (Hopkins, 2017, pp. 87-88). Most of the time, there are a series of meetings (pre-meetings and post-meetings) rather than one single meeting. Those meetings enable the concerned parties to understand the interactive behaviours of the participants and reach an agreement (Du, 2012, p. 35). As pointed out by Walker, Walker and Schmitz (2003), "decision making may take longer in such a culture because of the need to involve the many different parties and to build consensus" (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003, p. 108).

Building Relationships

Building strong relationships is required to reach an agreement with Chinese business people and that can take several meetings to achieve (Hopkins, 2017, pp. 87-88). In order to develop contacts, one has to establish personal relationships. Building relationships is therefore one of the keys to doing business in China. It is a long process that will gradually lead to concrete negotiations and an agreement (Zinzius, 2004, p. 94). These business relationships facilitate the accomplishment of work-related tasks and can be helpful in the long-run when one encounters issues or needs help for matters such as approval or delivery and payment issues. Establishing personal relationships in a business context will help build trust between the parties and ensure that each of them will respect the agreement. In order to build relationships, long-term commitment has to be demonstrated to the other party (Guo, Rammal, Benson, Zhu, & Dowling, 2018, pp. 458-460). One needs to take the time to establish a close business and personal relationship with the business partners. This is usually achieved by engaging in small talk and offering hospitality from both sides (Zinzius, 2004, p. 94).

Exchange of Favours

When one makes a concession, one expects to get something in return. If the business partner does not do it, it can be interpreted as a weakness by the Chinese (Zinzius, 2004, p. 94). As the exchange of favours is a common thing to do in China, refusing a favour request from a network member can result in a loss of ‘face’ for both sides (Guo, Rammal, Benson, Zhu, & Dowling, 2018, p. 459).

Giving ‘Face’

Each business partner should respect each other and take one another seriously (Zinzius, 2004, p. 94). Giving ‘face’ is essential in Chinese culture. When doing business with Chinese counterparts, one should give ‘face’ and avoid causing a loss of ‘face’ which can be unforgivable and irreparable. Chinese people tend to be more friendly and helpful if they have the impression that they have gained ‘face’. Face-giving practices can be decisive for making or breaking deals with Chinese business partners and therefore doing successful business in China. Being conscious of ‘face’ matters and trying hard to understand others’ ‘face’ needs and expectations are therefore necessary and crucial in Chinese culture (Stadler, 2011, pp. 104-107).

2.2. Analysis of Non-Scientific Sources

This section will analyse the same topics as in the previous section (cf. 2.1.), except that the information is taken from non-scientific sources.

The type of non-scientific sources analysed in this section consists of various online articles displayed on different types of websites. A number of key words (e.g. ‘doing business in China’, ‘politeness in Chinese business’, ‘business culture in China’, etc.) were keyed into the Internet search engine “Google” to retrieve a series of online sources. These online sources can be divided into seven different categories: guides, consulting companies, staffing and recruiting companies, magazines, newspapers, language learning tools and tour companies.

It was decided to select a range of non-scientific sources to be able to explore the variety of information and facts available. This should make it possible to obtain a more general vision,

as the information given can vary depending on the author and the goal of these articles. For this reason, focusing on not only one but several types of non-scientific sources can be of great interest.

Website	Category	Referred in the text as	Description
Commisceo Global ¹	Guide	Commisceo Global	Award-winning guides to the culture, people, language and social/business etiquette of countries around the world.
Asialink Business ²	Consulting company	Asialink Business	As Australia's National Centre for Asia Capability, Asialink Business provides tailored solutions to help Australian businesses seize the potential of diverse Asian markets with support of the Australian government.
China Business Review ³	Magazine	China Business Review	The official magazine of the US-China Business Council, a non-profit and nonpartisan trade association that represents more than 200 American companies doing business in China.

¹ Commisceo Global (n.d.). *你好! (Hello!) and Welcome to our Guide to Chinese Culture, Customs, Business Practices & Etiquette*. Retrieved June 21, 2019 from <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/china-guide#c5>

² Asialink Business (n.d.). *Chinese business culture and etiquette*. Retrieved June 20, 2019 from <https://asialinkbusiness.com.au/china/conducting-business-in-china/chinese-business-culture?doNothing=1>

³ China Business Review (2008). *China's Changing Culture and Etiquette*. Retrieved June 20, 2019 from <https://www.chinabusinessreview.com/chinas-changing-culture-and-etiquette/>

Career China ⁴	Staffing and recruiting company	Smith	With the support of the government, Career China is committed to complying with employment policies and procedures in an effort to promote a positive reputation that will attract more international talent to China.
Houston Chronicle ⁵	Newspaper	Durden	The Houston Chronicle is one of the largest newspapers in the United States and is committed to covering state, national and international news of special interest to residents of Houston and Texas.
Chinese Connects ⁶	Consulting company	Chinese Connects	Chinese Connects is a leading consulting firm offering US-based representation office service for companies from China and Taiwan.
China Highlights ⁷	Tour company	China Highlights	China Highlights is a Chinese tour company that specialises in customised and creative China tours.
World Business Culture ⁸	Consulting company	World Business Culture	World Business Culture pulls together in-depth, country-focused information from some of the world's leading professionals who spend their lives advising clients on how to improve international business performance.

⁴ Smith, Liz (2017). *What To Expect of Chinese Business Culture: East vs. West*, Career China. Retrieved June 20, 2019 from <https://www.careerchina.com/blog/Chinese-Business-Culture>

⁵ Durden, Olivia (2018). *American vs. Chinese Business Culture*, Houston Chronicle. Retrieved June 21, 2019 from <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/american-vs-chinese-business-culture-59039.html>

⁶ Chinese Connects (2014). *Politeness in Chinese Culture: Business Affairs and Why Drinking is Important*. Retrieved June 21, 2019 from <http://translate.chineseconnects.com/politeness-drinking/>

⁷ China Highlights (2019). *Chinese Etiquette – Do's and Don'ts in China*. Retrieved June 21, 2019 from <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/guidebook/etiquette.htm>

⁸ World Business Culture (n.d.). *Chinese Business Meeting Etiquette*. Retrieved June 21, 2019 from <https://www.worldbusinessculture.com/country-profiles/china/culture/business-meeting-etiquette/>

Dig Mandarin ⁹	Mandarin Chinese learning tool	Cao	Dig Mandarin contains comprehensive articles on Mandarin Chinese learning skills along with case studies, reviews of the latest popular Chinese textbooks or tools, and advice direct from professional Chinese language experts, Chinese video lessons, learner community, etc.
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Table 4: *Categories of the non-scientific sources*

2.2.1. Chinese Stereotypes in Business: Culture and Mentality

Chinese culture strongly influences all aspects of daily life, including business. One simple cultural misunderstanding can put an end to good business relationships. Thus, cultural competences are highly important to acquire in order to do business in China, even though cultural norms are still changing. Having basic knowledge of Chinese history and understanding cultural concepts and differences is also useful in personal and business dealings (China Business Review). Moreover, Confucianism's core value of etiquette and politeness is an essential key for doing business in China and deeply influences Chinese culture. Great emphasis is put on respect for education, authority and age (Asialink Business).

In a business context, Chinese people avoid criticising or patronising others as it can result in a loss of 'face' and bring business relationships or negotiations to an end (Asialink Business). If one member of a group loses 'face', the other members of the group also lose 'face' (e.g. family, village, country, etc.). In general, Chinese people take things personally, which explains why they want to avoid public criticism. Some of them also prefer to keep their opinion to themselves. However, this can be challenging in the sense that it can be hard for a person to know the true opinion of others and it can be even harder to obtain information about the job performance of other people (Smith).

This importance of the concept of 'saving face' is also present in the business world in China, as rank and hierarchy are part of Chinese culture. China remains a strict hierarchical society in

⁹ Cao, Jing (2019). *12 Tips for Chinese Business Etiquette and Culture*. Retrieved June 20, 2019 from <https://www.digmandarin.com/chinese-business-culture-etiquette.html>

which the elders are afforded the greatest reverence (Commisceo Global). For example, sending a low-ranking person to receive a high-ranking person can cause a loss of ‘face’ for the person of higher status (China Business Review). In addition, a person from a lower rank should not question the decisions made by the higher ranks as this can be considered as a lack of respect. The most senior person in the company is expected to be met with loyalty and obedience (Commisceo Global). Furthermore, each person in the company will be addressed according to their job title (e.g. ‘manager’ or ‘director’ followed by the last name) to distinguish people (Smith).

In Chinese business culture, relationships (‘guanxi’) and trust are important to build. For example, a strong business relationship can be developed by talking about one’s private life, including hobbies or family. Private and professional lives are often mixed and colleagues tend to consider themselves as family members. It is also common for the boss to contact employees outside the working hours (Smith). Some extra activities can be organised out of business hours in order to develop relationships with business partners (e.g. banquets, business meals or karaoke sessions). Therefore, business meetings consist mostly of slow decision-making processes and relation-building (China Business Review).

In this context, relationships (‘guanxi’) can also refer to a network of contacts that can be used when an individual needs some help by exerting influence to get or achieve something. However, when asking for favours or help, there is an implicit expectation of reciprocity that puts the receiver “in debt” until the favour is returned (China Business Review). Despite the fact that these relationships can help conduct business in China and give businesses the opportunity to expand, they might also lead to corruption (e.g. by signing a contract with a person from the network instead of concluding a partnership with better qualified people) (Asialink Business).

2.2.2. Politeness in the Chinese Workplace

Politeness and courtesy are fundamental in Chinese business. Asking personal questions is a common politeness practice that the Chinese do before even starting a discussion or a meeting, which shows interest to the business partners. This type of behaviour is part of the social etiquette and the behavioural norms that help to give ‘face’ and maintain harmony (Asialink Business). In addition, “face is associated with honour, dignity, and deep sense of pride.

Causing someone to lose face, even if the offense was unintentional, could cause serious damage to a relationship” (China Business Review).

Having manners and showing humility are also part of politeness in China. Chinese people tend to be self-deprecating to be polite rather than accepting compliments or praise directly. Boasting or bragging is considered impolite (China Business Review). Furthermore, Chinese business people do not like conflicts and disagreements. The Chinese will always show respect to the business partners and choose indirect ways to negotiate. They will not hesitate to lie about what they think in order to maintain courtesy and politeness in their dealings. Sometimes, positive answers mean negative answers to prevent losing ‘face’ and conflicts (Durden). Moreover, Chinese people put great value on trust and personal guarantees, which means that, in business contexts, each party is expected to do their part of the agreement. Business partners are often considered more as friends with whom reliable relationships must be developed (Durden).

Direct body contact is often avoided as well as eye contact, which can be perceived as disrespectful and rude for Chinese people. People usually look down and avoid looking straight in somebody’s eyes as a mark of respect (World Business Culture). However, handshakes have become a standard form of greeting with foreigners (Commisceo Global). They are usually used in business settings with both men and women no matter the age or seniority of the person (Asialink Business).

Giving gifts or showing hospitality is a common Chinese custom and can be used as a way to strengthen business relationships. Chinese business people generally expect to wine and dine their business partners. This type of invitation does not aim at discussing business but to make the business partners feel respected and welcomed (Durden). Business owners show their politeness and gratitude to the business partners by treating them to a nice meal with drinks. Food and alcohol are usually associated to high social events and a representation of the connection between individuals and groups. Making their business partners drink alcohol can also be a means of testing their strength and trust by, for example, observing their reactions while being drunk. This can help reveal if the person is reliable or not, as the Chinese are more likely to engage further in business with somebody they trust and with whom they established a strong relationship (Chinese Connects).

In gift-giving contexts, it is typical for Chinese people to refuse one or two times before finally accepting the gift. Politely refusing a gift before accepting it is the norm in Chinese culture (Chinese Highlights). In business settings, gift-giving can be more difficult as it can be mistaken for bribery, especially with the government. In this context, giving expensive gifts should be avoided (World Business Culture).

2.2.3. Recommendations

Almost all of the sources analysed include tips and recommendations about doing business in China. Those recommendations can vary depending on the author and the goal of the article (e.g. the recommendations on Asialink Business' website – an Australian company that helps Australian companies do business in China with support of the Australian government – could differ from those on Career China's website – a Chinese company that promotes a positive reputation of China to attract foreign businesses with support of the Chinese government). However, most of them converge towards similar statements and observations and point out the following main elements.

Being Patient

As business negotiations occur at a slow pace, one must be patient and avoid high-pressure tactics. Impatience would lead to nothing else than delay things even more. Decision-making does not take place during meetings and is a long process as it requires careful review and consideration. In general, meetings aim at exchanging information and building relationships. Negotiations are also a way to evaluate the other party to know if it is worthy and reliable in order to build a relationship (World Business Culture).

Being Punctual

One should arrive on time or slightly earlier as punctuality is viewed as a virtue in China. Coming late to a meeting could be seen as an insult and could negatively affect and damage the business relationship (Commisceo Global).

Building Relationships

One should take time to build relationships with business partners and should not underestimate the importance of the relationship-building process (World Business Culture). Different ways can be used to build and reinforce relationships with business partners such as organising activities out of working hours.

Giving Gifts

Exchanging gifts is part of the ritual of business relationship development. One has to make sure to choose the right gift depending on the context. Moreover, it is crucial to consider Chinese traditions when choosing gifts. For instance, it is better to avoid giving any sharp objects that could mean wishing the end of the relationship. Offering clocks is also associated with death due to similarities in pronunciation. If the gift is wrapped, the receiver will usually not open it in front of the giver and will open it later. Those aspects need to be taken into account in order to not offend or insult Chinese people by mistake (Cao).

Maintaining ‘Face’, Harmony and Respect

One has to always make sure to maintain ‘face’ and harmony with Chinese people through actions or words that are likely to raise self-esteem (e.g. by complimenting or showing respect), especially with older people and seniority. For example, when meeting and greeting older or senior people, the Chinese often slightly nod or bow their head in order to display extra courtesy to them (Asialink Business). One has to make sure to treat older and senior people with respect and follow the line of the hierarchy starting to greet from the most senior or oldest person and ending with the person with the lowest rank (Smith). Showing respect is therefore a way individuals can prove themselves to be honourable and in turn worthy of respect (World Business Culture).

Maintaining ‘face’ can also be realised by not showing anger and avoiding confrontation or conflict. Negative answers should be rather expressed implicitly and gently. Criticism, if necessary, should be done in private (China Business Review). Public criticism or putting a person in an embarrassing situation is absolutely unacceptable in China (Commisceo Global).

2.3. Comparison Between the Scientific and Non-Scientific Sources

After analysing the scientific and non-scientific sources above, some similarities and differences can be highlighted. In this part, the main characteristics mentioned in the different sources will be compared with each other in order to point out the main similarities and differences (cf. Table 5).

2.3.1. Similarities and Differences

Element	Scientific sources	Non-scientific sources
Confucianism	Strongly rooted in Chinese culture	
Relationships ('guanxi')	Importance of relationships	
The notion of 'face'	Importance of giving/maintaining/saving 'face'	
Hierarchy	Respect for hierarchy and age	
Trust	Family business	Importance of building trust with business partners
Personal space	No body contact	No body contact and no eye contact but handshakes
Politeness	Mixing personal and professional life Asking personal questions	
	Activities out of working hours	
	Indirectness, avoiding criticism	Humility, self-deprecating, indirectness, avoiding criticism
	Exchange of favours	
	/	Gift-giving

Table 5: Similarities and differences between the scientific and non-scientific sources analysed

Confucianism

Both scientific and non-scientific sources mention the strong influence of Confucianism in Chinese culture and its impact on all areas of everyday life in China. For instance, relationships and hierarchy are determined by the Confucian social order represented by five types of relationships (emperor-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend) in which one person is always hierarchically superior to the other one. Humility, harmony and trust are also all part of the Confucian values.

Relationships ('Guanxi')

All sources refer to relationships as crucial in the Chinese's everyday life and in business contexts. Building relationships is a long process that is necessary. In the scientific sources, relationships can be divided into two types according to the degree of loyalty there is between the people: 'in-group' and 'out-group'. The members of the 'in-group' tend to enjoy closer relationships between them, whereas the members of the 'out-group' tend to have more distant and formal relationships between them. According to the non-scientific sources, business relationships are essential for Chinese people to establish trust with business partners. In China, inviting for wine and drinks is also common to reinforce business relationships.

Giving, Saving, and Maintaining 'Face'

All sources agree that the notion of 'face' is deeply embedded in Chinese culture. Chinese people are highly aware of the consequences of a loss of 'face' and make sure to always give 'face' to their interlocutor. Making a person lose 'face' can be terrible and affect relationships between the people. In order to maintain their interlocutor's 'face', different behaviours can be adopted to avoid conflicts and disagreements (e.g. using compliments, indirect and implicit way of speaking, not revealing one's own thoughts, etc.).

Hierarchy

As part of the Confucian values, hierarchy is also an important element that was pointed out in the scientific and non-scientific sources. One must show respect to older and senior people and should not contest any decision made by them. Hierarchy is present everywhere and determines

the social roles of each individual within their group (e.g. family, company, village, society, etc.). The person occupying the inferior role should always stay loyal and obedient to their superior.

Trust

The scientific sources analysed here mention that Chinese people consider their family members as the most trustworthy and prefer to have a family business. In the non-scientific sources, family businesses were not really mentioned, as most of the online articles were about how to do business in China and were therefore written for foreigners, mostly Westerners. However, trust was mostly discussed as quite crucial to build with business partners.

Personal Space

The Chinese perception of personal space was only described in one scientific source (Tirpitz & Zhu, 2015, p. 160). Chinese people are not used to having direct body contact with others such as handshakes and hugs, although they usually do not get uncomfortable or offended if people get physically too close to them (e.g. in a public bus or elevator). However, in the non-scientific sources, it was mentioned several times that the Chinese actually do handshakes when greeting people, especially in business settings and with foreigners.

Politeness

All sources explain that Chinese people usually mix their private and professional life, even in a business context. The Chinese commonly ask private questions before the business meeting even starts, which is simply out of politeness. This allows them to show interest in their business partners and give them 'face'. Both types of sources also mentioned that activities out of working hours are common in China in order to reinforce the relationships with business partners.

The scientific sources specify that politeness strategies can vary depending on the type of relationships the individuals have as well as on the social attributes. Both types of sources agree that showing politeness and respect is crucial, especially with older and senior people. Showing humility and being self-deprecating were both mentioned in the non-scientific sources, whereas

being indirect and avoiding criticism were mentioned in both types of sources. All of them are different ways to show respect and prevent a loss of 'face'.

Regarding the exchange of favours, the scientific sources assert that the closer a relationship is, the better the exchanges of favours are. In both scientific and non-scientific sources, something is expected in return when a person makes a concession in most cases. Refusing a favour request from a network member should be avoided as it can lead to a loss of 'face' for both of them. Moreover, there is in general an implicit expectation of reciprocity when a favour is done by a person to another. The one asking for a favour is therefore expected to return the favour he or she received.

Gift-giving was mostly mentioned in the non-scientific sources: it is described as a common custom in China and can be a way to reinforce business relationships. One has to understand that the Chinese usually refuse several times before accepting a gift as part of the Chinese tradition. Sometimes, a gift can also be considered as bribery, particularly in business contexts and with government officials, which is why it is essential to enquire about gift-giving traditions and customs, including Chinese superstitions and beliefs, in order to avoid offending anyone.

2.4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was mainly to compare scientific and non-scientific sources in order to observe and underline similarities and differences between what they assert and claim as true regarding Chinese culture, mentality and politeness in the workplace. The comparison of the sources has shown that most sources include the same main topics and characteristics, which are considered important in Chinese society. Some key characteristics such as 'face', relationships ('guanxi'), hierarchy and trust have been mentioned and pointed out several times in most of the scientific and non-scientific sources. The reason for such a high number of similarities may well be explained by the tendency of non-scientific sources to rely on scientific sources to write about specific topics, without necessarily referring to any scientific sources.

Nevertheless, some differences could be observed such as more concrete examples in various business situations that were described in the non-scientific sources. Some more practical and

detailed information are mentioned in the non-scientific sources that are not mentioned in the scientific sources. For example, Chinese traditions and customs for giving gifts were mentioned and explained in detail in the non-scientific sources along with the common Chinese superstitions. The fact that the non-scientific online sources are targeted at business people from Western countries who would like to do business in China can explain the concrete aspects that were not always mentioned in the scientific sources (e.g. gift-giving).

As the reviewing and publishing process can take a long time and as they cannot readily be updated, some scientific sources could include certain facts that are not true anymore. By contrast, non-scientific sources, particularly online articles, can easily be modified and adapted to the current situations. Information can also differ from scientific sources as an online article or blog can convey or imply a person's opinion, which can make the article more subjective than objective. People can perceive and interpret the Chinese's behaviours, actions or communication in a variety of ways. Other elements such as the country of origin of the authors of the articles or the type of company they work for could also have an impact on what is discussed in the articles.

PRACTICAL PART

CHAPTER 3 – DATA AND METHOD

The objective of this practical part is to address the two major research questions of this dissertation:

- 1) *What are the major components in Chinese business culture that significantly influence politeness in the Chinese workplace?*
- 2) *How is politeness manifested in daily operations in the Chinese workplace?*

In order to answer those research questions, the survey conducted within the framework of this dissertation focused on the three main topics that stuck out from the sources analysed in the theoretical part. All of them were analysed in Chinese business settings:

- 1) *Relationships ('guanxi')*
- 2) *The notion of 'face' (giving, maintaining and saving 'face')*
- 3) *Manners and politeness*

3.1. Data

The target audience for the survey in this dissertation was mainly Chinese people currently working in a company in China. However, the survey also allowed people who have worked with Chinese business people to take part, as this could help to observe any difference with native Chinese people. The choice of this target audience was based on the aim of this dissertation, i.e. to analyse codes of politeness in a Chinese business context.

The links of the survey were firstly sent to some friends and family members who were asked to share the link with their Chinese friends, acquaintances, colleagues or any other Chinese person currently working in China. The links were mostly sent through WeChat (or 微信 Weixin'), the Chinese social media and multipurpose application that has become one of the most important applications in China (Montag, Becker, & Gan, 2018).

The analysis of the results and their comparison with the data previously analysed in the theoretical part will address the research questions in order to explore the current Chinese business culture and identify the main codes of politeness in the Chinese workplace.

The survey was conducted in Belgium and China through two different tools: *Google form*¹⁰ and *Wen Juan Xing* (‘问卷星’)¹¹, the main online survey tool used in China. *Google form* is one of the most common tools used to conduct surveys. However, as *Google* is censored in China due to various reasons, it was necessary to also conduct the survey through a Chinese tool. For both tools, two versions of the survey were used: one in English and one in Chinese (see Appendix 1). Thus, the people answering the survey were able to choose the language they preferred by clicking on the link of their choice.

Although the nature of the survey was quantitative, it was also aiming to collect more detailed data which could yield more qualitative findings. For this reason, the question “why?” was asked after every possible answer to the multiple-choice questions in order to give participants the opportunity to provide further details. However, knowing that all of them were not going to explain each of their answer and in case there were not sufficient detailed answers, an extra question was added at the end of the survey to ask whether the participant would be willing to be contacted personally for further questions to collect more precise data. Each survey question is related to one specific research question.

3.2. Method

The method consisted of conducting an online survey among several Chinese companies based in Mainland China in order to collect opinions and perspectives from business people currently working in China. The online survey essentially focused on the three topics selected above (i.e. relationship (‘guanxi’), the notion of ‘face’ and manners/politeness) and mostly included multiple-choice questions:

¹⁰ Google Form, <https://www.google.com/forms/about/>

¹¹ Wen Juan Xin, <https://www.wjx.cn>

***18. How important is it to take time to build relationships before negotiating with business partners?**

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Not so important
- ☐ Not important at all

***19. When you make a concession or do someone a favour, do you expect something in return?**

- ☐ Yes, why? _____
- ☐ No, why? _____

Figure 6: Typical multiple-choice questions from the online survey

The questions firstly concerned the person's personal information (such as age, gender or native language) in order to sort the respondents by category. The questions then focused on the chosen topics and were divided into several sub-questions related to the main topics (see Appendix 1).

Before asking any specific question, broader questions were asked in the first place regarding Chinese culture:

11. Which element(s) below is/are the most important at your workplace? To what extent are they important (on a scale from 0 to 5, with 0 as the lowest and 5 as the highest)?

12. Are you aware of the Confucian values (harmony, respect, humility, loyalty, etc.)? Do you apply them in your everyday life, including at your workplace?

13. Do you always show respect and loyalty to your superior and older/senior people in the company?

14. Who do you trust the most and stay the most loyal to when doing business?

Those questions aimed to evaluate the extent to which they are actually aware of all the values and rules that are part of Chinese culture. Some people may behave and act according to Chinese traditions, customs and/or values. However, this does not mean that they are consciously aware of them. Those questions therefore aimed at analysing and determining how

many business people are actually conscious of these cultural elements and how much importance is put on them.

The next questions in the survey were divided in relation to each of the chosen topics that will be analysed in this practical part (i.e. relationships ('guanxi'), the notion of 'face' and manners/politeness).

Regarding relationships, the questions mainly aimed to evaluate the importance of building relationships in the workplace, as it was presented in the theoretical sources as a crucial element in Chinese culture:

15. When doing business, do you always try to build relationships with business partners?

16. Do you take your time when negotiating with business partners?

17. If yes, for which reason?

18. How important is it to take time to build relationships before negotiating with business partners?

19. When you make a concession or do someone a favour, do you expect something in return?

20. Do you participate in (not work-related) activities with your business partners out of working hours?

Giving, maintaining and saving 'face' are also very deeply rooted in Chinese culture and mentioned in most of the sources analysed in the theoretical part. Some questions were asked in order to determine by which means the Chinese maintain their interlocutors' 'face':

21. Do you prefer to say 'no' outright (directly and frankly) or in a more indirect and implicit way?

22. Do you try to avoid disagreeing and/or criticising someone from a lower position (e.g. your subordinate) in a business meeting?

23. Do you try to avoid disagreeing and/or criticising someone from a higher position (e.g. your manager) in a business meeting?

24. Do you usually feel embarrassed or ashamed if someone disrespects you, criticises you or disagrees with you in a business context?

25. When there is a conflict during a business meeting, do you tend to avoid it or to solve it immediately?

The questions related to manners and politeness aimed to collect more precise answers in specific situations. The data that will be obtained for this topic will determine the current practices and customs in Chinese business culture.

26. How do you greet/say goodbye to people?

27. Is it important to arrive on time at business meetings?

28. Do you usually ask personal questions before beginning a business meeting with business partners?

29. Do you talk about your private life at work?

30. If yes, with whom?

31. Do you often give gifts in a business context?

32. If yes, on what occasion?

One last question was asked for people who would like to give more information. The objective was to collect more detailed and accurate data, as the majority of the survey was made up of multiple-choice questions and only cover specific situations and topics. Furthermore, people may not always add information in the ‘please specify’ boxes. Thus, this question would enable to offset the potential lack of data in the results of the survey.

CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As seen in the first two chapters of this dissertation, codes of politeness in Chinese companies include a wide variety of elements. To narrow down the research, this fourth chapter will focus on the most salient topics discussed by the majority of the sources analysed in the theoretical part, that is, relationships ('guanxi'), the notion of 'face' and politeness. The aim is to analyse the data collected through an online survey conducted among Chinese businesses located in China. The data gathered in the theoretical part will be then compared to the findings from the online survey in order to uncover the similarities and differences between the assertions made by the various theoretical sources analysed previously and those reported by people working in China today.

4.1. Analysis of the Survey Data

This section will first examine the information that was collected about the respondents in the survey (e.g. age, gender, type of company). The focus will then be on the respondents' answers to the questions about various aspects of politeness in the workplace. The data obtained from the online survey will be divided into the main topics selected above (i.e. relationships ('guanxi'), the notion of 'face' and manners/politeness).

4.1.1. Respondents

The online survey was filled out by a total of 30 people with a majority of female respondents. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 55. As the survey targeted Chinese people working in China, most of the respondents shared a lot of similarities such as having Mandarin as their native language and China as their native and working country. Out of the 30 respondents, only one person had Italian as their native language, even though their native and working country is China. Excluding this outlier, the results are in accordance with the target sample population for the survey. All the other respondents are native speakers of Mandarin Chinese currently working in China.

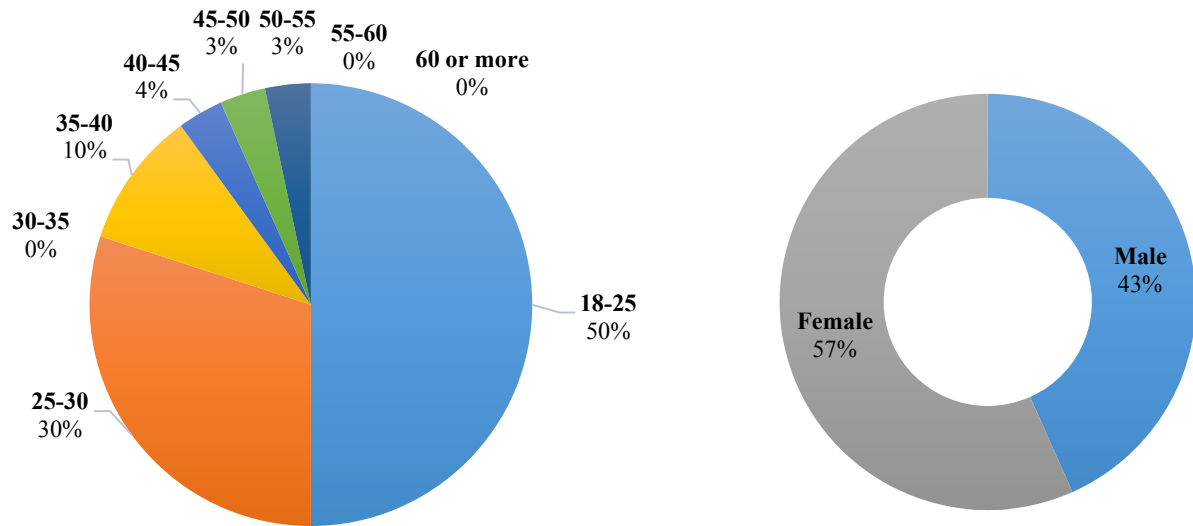


Figure 7: Age and gender of the respondents

AGE	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
18-25	8 27%	7 23%	15 50%
25-30	4 13%	5 17%	9 30%
30-35	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
35-40	3 10%	0 0%	3 10%
40-45	1 3%	0 0%	1 3%
45-50	1 3%	0 0%	1 3%
50-55	0 0%	1 3%	1 3%
55-60	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
60 or more	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
TOTAL	17 57%	13 43%	30 100%

Table 8: Demographic breakdown of the respondents

Figure 7 gives an overview of the age and gender of the respondents. 50% of the respondents are between 18 and 25 years old and 30% are between 25 and 30 years old. Few people are within the 35–40 range (10%) and very few between the 40–55 range (6%). None of the people taking part in the survey is between 30 and 35 years old, or 55 years old or more. Thus, a majority of the respondents are under 30 years old with 80% out of all the respondents. Regarding gender, the graph shows that 57% of the total survey respondents are female and 43% are male.

Table 8 displays the demographic breakdown of the respondents, providing an overview of which age group and gender was represented in the survey. Each column contains the number of the respondents highlighted in bold with the proportion of the total number of respondents they represent underneath. Table 8 shows that the vast majority of the respondents are female in the 18–30 age group (40%). Most male respondents are also in the same age group (40%). Thus, both females and males within the 18–30 range represent 80% of the total number of the respondents with 40% each. The rest of the female respondents in the survey are in the 35 to 50 age group and represents 16% of the total number of the respondents. On the other hand, the rest of the male respondents are in the 50 to 55 age group and only represents 3% of the total number of the respondents. The higher number of females within most of the age groups is due to a majority of female respondents (57%).

In addition, the types of company and working fields of the respondents display great variation, which is interesting to analyse as the company's culture can influence the way employees behave and act.

Type of company	Number of people	Total percentage
Start-up	6	20%
State-owned company	5	17%
Multinational	5	17%
Other	14	47%
Total	30	100%

Table 9: *Types of company of the respondents*

Due to the nature of the survey, the respondents could freely enter their own classification of their workplace, which resulted in a wide variety of answers that could not fit within a specific category (see Appendix 2). This explains the section “other” in the table that includes the types of company mentioned by only one or two respondents. 54% of the answers could therefore be classified into three different groups: start-up (20%), state-owned company (17%) and multinational (17%).

Similar to the self-reported types of company, the fields the respondents worked in were quite broad with 25 different categories (cf. Table 10). As there were 30 respondents in total, this represented a challenge for identifying more general fields in which the respondents operated in. However, some respondents mentioned similar fields such as education (10%), import and export (7%), manufacturing (7%) and media (7%). The other fields mentioned by only one participant (3%) were gathered in the “other” category in the table below (see Appendix 2).

Working field	Number of respondents	Total percentage
Education	3	10%
Import and export	2	7%
Manufacturing	2	7%
Media	2	7%
Other	21	70%
Total	30	100%

Table 10: *Working fields of the respondents*

The position in the company can also influence the way people behave and act as, for instance, a manager will probably not act in the same way as an employee. The survey showed a wide range of positions that are displayed in table 11 below:

Position	Number of people	Total percentage
Employee	7	23%
Manager	7	23%
Intern	4	13%

Assistant manager	3	10%
Engineer	2	7%
Teacher	2	7%
Administration staff	1	3%
Assistant director	1	3%
Financial consultant	1	3%
Graphic designer	1	3%
Head pharmacist	1	3%
Total	30	100%

Table 11: *Respondents' position in the company*

Some of the answers could be generalised into a single category called “employee”. In the Chinese workplace, the most general position is simply described as “worker” (工人) or “staff member”. Several respondents classified their work position as a general one, which would suggest a similar position to worker or employee. Therefore, for this dissertation, their answers were classified as “employee”, which refers to a general work position within a company.

The second most mentioned answer was “manager”. Several respondents reported different managerial positions such as “sales manager” or “product manager”. Due to the numerous variations within the managerial position, a general categorisation ‘manager’ was preferred to provide a better overview. This logic carries over and was applied to the other categories. However, some specific and clear job titles (such as graphic designer and head pharmacist) were retained as reported by the respondents.

The period of time in a company can also influence people in the sense that they will not act the same way if they have been working in the company for a longer or shorter time (e.g. they might be more at ease when they have been working with a company for longer).

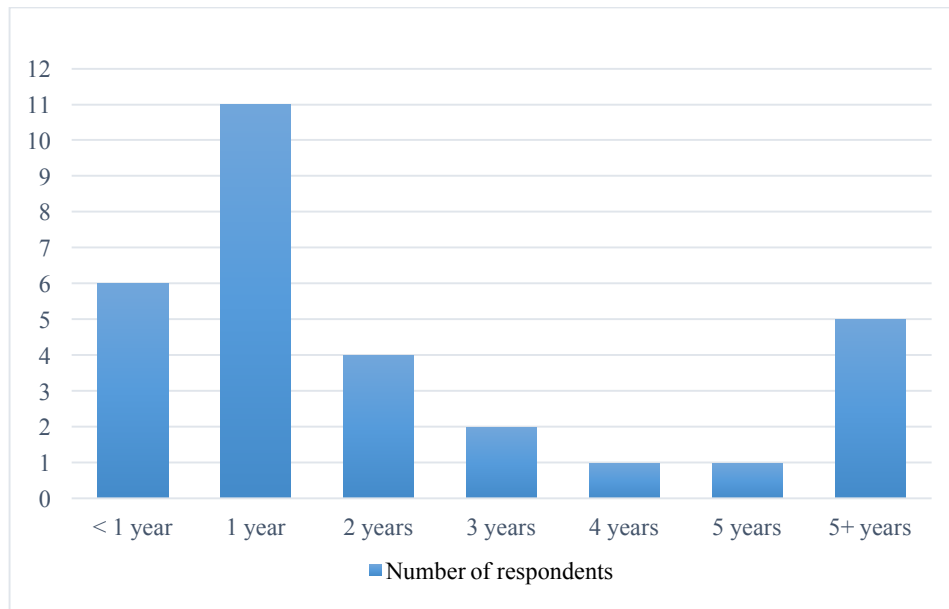


Figure 12: *Working period of time in the company*

Figure 12 shows that most of the respondents (37%) have been working for a period of one year with their company and about 20% of the respondents have stayed for less than one year. The period range varies from one and a half weeks to 32 years (see Appendix 2), illustrated within a period of 5 years or more in figure 12 due to a low number of respondents after 5 years. Therefore, the respondents with more than 5 years of experience in the company are gathered in the category “5+ years”.

4.1.2. Chinese Culture

For the following question (see Appendix 1), the respondents were asked to rank the importance of the mentioned elements – relationships (‘guanxi’), the notion of ‘face’, respect for the hierarchy, trust, respect for personal space, humility and harmony – on a five-point Likert scale (from 0 to 5), with 0 being the lowest score and 5 the highest score.

11. Which element(s) below is/are the most important at your workplace? To what extent are they important (on a scale from 0 to 5, 0 = lowest and 5 = highest)?

		N/A	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
Relationships ('guanxi')	Number of respondents	9	1	1	5	4	5	5	3,2
	Total percentage	30%	3%	3%	17%	13%	17%	17%	
Giving/ maintaining/ saving 'face'	Number of respondents	14	1	1	4	5	2	3	2,9
	Total percentage	47%	3%	3%	13%	17%	7%	10%	
Respect for hierarchy	Number of respondents	15	0	3	4	3	4	1	2,7
	Total percentage	50%	0%	10%	13%	10%	13%	3%	
Trust	Number of respondents	4	0	0	0	5	8	13	4,3
	Total percentage	13%	0%	0%	0%	17%	27%	43%	
Respect for personal space	Number of respondents	8	0	1	1	3	4	13	4,2
	Total percentage	27%	0%	3%	3%	10%	13%	43%	
Humility	Number of respondents	10	0	1	1	3	7	8	4
	Total percentage	33%	0%	3%	3%	10%	23%	27%	
Harmony	Number of respondents	9	0	1	2	1	7	10	4,1
	Total percentage	30%	0%	3%	7%	3%	23%	33%	
TOTAL	Number of answers	69	2	8	17	24	37	53	3,7

Table 13: *Answers to question 11 in the online survey*

Table 13 displays the total numbers of the respondents per element and per score. The percentages below those numbers refer to the proportion of the total number of respondents who selected the score. The column “N/A” (standing for “no answer”) refers to the people who did not give any score to the element.

The analysis of the answers reveals that the respondents placed a strong emphasis on the element of “trust” with 26 respondents (87%) giving it a score between 3 and 5, which demonstrates how important it is for the respondents who gave it a high score (average score = 4,3). It is also important to note that none of the respondents attributed a low score to it (0, 1 or 2) and that only four people did not provide a score (N/A). This suggests that the respondents value “trust” above all the other mentioned elements, closely followed by “respect for personal space” with 22 respondents (73%) choosing to score the element, most of them giving it a high score too (average score = 4,2). Those two elements are then followed by “harmony” (average score = 4,1), “humility” (average score = 4), “relationships (‘guanxi’)” (average score = 3,2), “giving/maintaining/saving ‘face’” (average score = 2,9) and “respect for hierarchy” (average score = 2,7). The latter receiving the lowest score and was the most disregarded by the respondents (50% N/A).

The next three questions are related to the previous one. The respondents were asked about the Confucian values (harmony, respect, humility, loyalty, etc.), which were described as deeply rooted in Chinese culture by the sources analysed in chapters 1 and 2.

12. Are you aware of the Confucian values (harmony, respect, humility, loyalty, etc.)? Do you apply them in your everyday life, including at your workplace?

	I am aware & apply them	I am aware & do not apply them	I am not aware & do not apply them	Total
Number of respondents	23	4	3	30
Total percentage	77%	13%	10%	100%

Table 14: *Answers to question 12 in the online survey*

Most of the respondents (77%) reported that they are aware of the Confucian values and apply them. On the other hand, 13% said that they do not apply them even though they are aware of them and 10% replied that they are not aware of them and do not apply them.

13. Do you always show respect and loyalty to your superior and older/senior people in the company?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	25	5	30
Total percentage	83%	17%	100%

Table 15: Answers to question 13 in the online survey

A great majority of the respondents (83%) reported showing respect and loyalty to their superior and older/senior people in the workplace, whereas 17% of them said they do not.

14. Who do you trust the most and stay the most loyal to when doing business?

	Family	Superior(s)	Colleagues	Older people	Senior people	Other
Number of respondents	20	9	9	3	10	3
Total percentage	67%	30%	30%	10%	33%	10%
Motivations						People with the same values [1] People who have the ability and know how to cooperate [1] Depends on who is the most reputable [1]

Table 16: Answers to question 14 in the online survey

Table 16 reveals that family members are the people most of the respondents (67%) trust and stay loyal to. Followed by senior people (33%), their superior(s) (30%) and their colleagues (30%). The people who they trust the least and who they do not stay loyal to are older people (10%). Three respondents (10%) replied with another answer, suggesting that the context and the person's values and capability are important aspects to take into account.

4.1.3. Relationships ('Guanxi')

The following questions and answers are gathered by topic. Firstly, the analysis addresses relationships ('guanxi'), followed by 'face' and finally manners and politeness, all within a business context.

Regarding relationships, the respondents were asked a total of six questions. The first question related to building relationships with their business partners:

15. When doing business, do you always try to build relationships with business partners?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	26	4	30
Total percentage	87%	13%	100%

Table 17: Answers to question 15 in the online survey

When asked about building relationships with business partners, 87% of the respondents replied that they always try to do it, while 13% reported that they do not.

16. Do you take your time when negotiating with business partners?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	26	4	30
Total percentage	87%	13%	100%

Table 18: Answers to question 16 in the online survey

The majority of the respondents (87%) answered that they prefer to take time when negotiating with business partners, when 13% do not.

17. If yes, for which reason?

	N/A	Build relationships	Push to make concessions	Relay the information to the leaders	Other
Number of respondents	6	19	10	10	0
Total percentage	20%	63%	33%	33%	0%

Table 19: Answers to question 17 in the online survey

In question 17, respondents were able to select multiple answers. Therefore, there might be a considerable overlap between the responses. The percentages in table 19 are based on the original sample of 30. Moreover, the question was aimed at people who had answered ‘yes’ to the previous question (n° 16). However, two people who had previously answered ‘no’ replied to this question, while four positive answers were not followed by any explanation.

A majority of the respondents (63%) motivated their choice of taking time when negotiating with business partners by saying that it makes it possible to build a relationship with the other party. On the other hand, 33% of the respondents explained their choice with the following: to push the other party to make concessions and/or to relay the information to their leaders. Six respondents did not answer the question (20% N/A). Furthermore, none of the respondents gave another answer than those mentioned (“*Other reason (please specify)*”, see Appendix 1).

18. How important is it to take time to build relationships before negotiating with business partners?

	Not important at all	Not so important	Important	Very important	Total
Number of respondents	0	2	13	15	30
Total percentage	0%	7%	43%	50%	100%

Table 20: Answers to question 18 in the online survey

Table 20 exhibits the breakdown of the respondents' choice regarding the importance they put on taking time to build relationships before negotiating with business partners. The majority of the respondents (50%) chose "very important" as an answer. Close to the majority, 43% of the respondents consider it as "important". Only 7% do not give that much importance to it while none of the respondents answered "not important at all".

19. When you make a concession or do someone a favour, do you expect something in return?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	15	15	30
Total percentage	50%	50%	100%
Motivations	Not necessarily a return, but a hope for a response [1] It makes sense to have something in return [1] Concessions without return are meaningless [1] Need for gratitude [1] Every sacrifice made in the workplace is an investment [1] Hoping for the other party to give in next time [1] Because it is business [1]	Not expecting anything in return [5] To conduct long-term business [1]	

Table 21: *Answers to question 19 in the online survey*

Starting from question 21, the question "why?" was added to most of the questions. This extra question was not compulsory but made it possible to collect more detailed answers and/or explanations (cf. 'motivations' in the tables). Those motivations are mainly translations of the respondents' answers, as most of them replied in Mandarin Chinese. The number of people giving the specific reason(s) is indicated in square brackets.

Question 19 divided opinions as 50% replied that they were expecting something in return after making a concession or doing someone a favour and 50% replied that they do not. Different reasons were mentioned. For example, those who answered ‘yes’ expect something in return as a way to show gratitude.

20. Do you participate in (non-work-related) activities with your business partners out of working hours?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	23	7	30
Total percentage	77%	23%	100%
Motivations	To improve/strengthen the relationship [3] To create emotional contact [1] To develop friendship [2] To improve mutual trust [1] As an entertainment [2] To follow the others [1] To understand a person’s personality and facilitate more harmonious cooperation [1] To improve communication and harmony [1]	Private and professional life are different [3] Do not like it [1] None of their business [1]	

Table 22: *Answers to question 20 in the online survey*

A large majority of the respondents (77%) reported that they participate in (non-work-related) activities with their business partners out of working hours. The main common reasons are to improve or strengthen their relationship, to develop friendship or to entertain themselves. On

the other hand, 23% of the respondents answered ‘no’, mostly because they consider private and professional life as separate.

4.1.4. The Notion of ‘Face’

21. Do you prefer to say ‘no’ outright (directly and frankly) or in a more indirect and implicit way?

	Saying 'no' outright	Not saying 'no' outright	Total
Number of respondents	16	14	30
Total percentage	53%	47%	100%

Table 23: Answers to question 21 in the online survey

Both options were selected by almost the same number of respondents, with a slightly higher percentage of people preferring to say ‘no’ outright (53%) and a smaller number of people who prefer to say ‘no’ in a more indirect and implicit way (47%).

22. Do you try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a lower position (e.g. your subordinate) in a business meeting?

	Try to avoid	Do not try to avoid	Total
Number of respondents	18	12	30
Total percentage	60%	40%	100%
Motivations	Find another method of communication to let the other party know without offending [2] Not to offend the other party [1] To maintain a good relationship [2]	It is their duty to tell their subordinates when they make mistakes [2] Need to be frank [3] To improve the communication efficiently [1]	

	Not to hurt each other's self-esteem [1] Mutual respect [3]	Need to say to avoid bigger problems in the future [1]	
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Table 24: Answers to question 22 in the online survey

Most of the respondents (60%) try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a lower position in a business meeting out of mutual respect, in order to maintain a good relationship or to avoid offending the other person, for example. 40% of the respondents reported that they do not try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising, mentioning a need to be frank or as their duty to correct their subordinates when they make mistakes, for example.

23. Do you try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a higher position (e.g. your manager) in a business meeting?

	Try to avoid	Do not try to avoid	Total
Number of respondents	15	15	30
Total percentage	50%	50%	100%
Motivations	It is easier [1] Leaders may represent the entire company [1] To maintain good relationships [1] Not to get fired [1] Unless their problems have seriously affected the progress of the team project, there is no need to remind them at the expense of personal impressions [1]	Need to tell the truth with facts [1] To be frank [4] To improve communication [1] To point out the problems [1] Need to give each other's own opinions [2] The leader cannot consider all the aspects by himself/herself [1]	

Table 25: Answers to question 23 in the online survey

Both options got the same number of votes by the respondents (50%-50%) for various reasons. Among those who try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a higher position, five people gave a reason for their choice, including maintaining good relationships or because they consider that there is no need unless it affects their work in progress. For those who do not try to avoid the situation, one common reason is to stay frank or the need to give their own opinions.

24. Do you usually feel embarrassed or ashamed if someone disrespects you, criticises you or disagrees with you in a business context?

	Feel embarrassed/ashamed	Do not feel embarrassed/ashamed	Total
Number of respondents	11	19	30
Total percentage	37%	63%	100%
Motivations	Want to maintain good 'face' [1] Expectation of mutual respect and recognition [2] Feel unhappy [1] Not in public [1]	Can be beneficial [1] Facts are true [2] Work is work [2] Do not think too much [1] The other person should be ashamed [1] Need to consider different opinions [3] Not embarrassed but angry [1]	

Table 26: Answers to question 24 in the online survey

The majority of the respondents (63%) claimed that they do not feel embarrassed or ashamed when someone disrespects them, criticises them or does not agree with them. The main reasons obtained include: a need to consider different opinions, telling facts is telling the truth or work should not affect them. On the other hand, 37% of the respondents answered that they would feel embarrassed or ashamed. Different reasons were also mentioned such as a need to receive mutual respect and recognition or a desire to maintain their 'face'.

25. When there is a conflict during a business meeting, do you tend to avoid it or to solve it immediately?

	Solve it immediately	Avoid it	Total
Number of respondents	14	16	30
Total percentage	47%	53%	100%
Motivations	It is bad to let others bear grudges [1] It is better to solve it than doing nothing [1] Conflicts are inevitable [1] It will be forgotten quickly [1] It is the best solution [1]	To minimise the damage [1] It is better when there is no conflict [1] To seek common ground [1] Personality reason [1] To improve business activities [1] To maintain a harmonious relationship and avoid losing 'face' [1]	

Table 27: Answers to question 25 in the online survey

The number of respondents who selected each option is quite similar. 53% of the respondents answered they would tend to avoid a conflict during a business meeting, whereas 47% of them would try to solve it immediately. For instance, some of them specified that it is better to avoid conflict to limit the damage and to improve business activities. By contrast, other explanations were that it is better to try to solve it than doing nothing and to avoid grudges.

4.1.5. Manners and Politeness

26. How do you greet/say goodbye to people?

	Number of respondents	Total percentage
Handshaking	21	70%
Nodding the head	12	40%

No gestures (just words)	5	17%
Hugging	4	13%
Kissing on the cheek(s)	3	10%
Other	2	7%
	Waving [1] Bowing [1]	

Table 28: *Answers to question 26 in the online survey*

Table 28 gives an overview of the options chosen by the respondents. Several answers could be selected. The percentage corresponds to the proportion of the total number of respondents who selected the element. For this question, 21 respondents selected handshaking as a way to greet or say goodbye to people, representing 70% of all the respondents. The second most chosen way is nodding the head with 40%. Followed by 'just words' (17%), hugging (13%), and, finally, kissing on the cheek(s) (10%). Two people (7%) described other ways, which are waving and bowing.

27. Is it important to arrive on time at business meetings?

	Important	Not important	Total
Number of respondents	30	0	30
Total percentage	100%	0%	100%
Motivations	Time is the most important thing [2] Punctuality is a very important quality [1] Effectiveness [1] Integrity [2] Punctuality is appreciated [1] Punctuality is the great virtue of mankind [1] Personal habit [1]		

	Importance of the concept of time [2] Punctuality is a basic business etiquette [1] Need to arrive earlier to prepare the work [1] Being punctual is respect [1]		
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Table 29: Answers to question 27 in the online survey

For this question, all the respondents (100%) answered that it is important to arrive on time at business meetings. Several reasons were given such as the importance of time and punctuality or as a way to show respect.

28. Do you usually ask personal questions before beginning a business meeting with business partners?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	8	22	30
Total percentage	27%	73%	100%
Motivations	Quick start [1] Make the communication easier [1] Learn more about the person [1]	Want to listen to others' opinions/ideas [2] Separation between professional and private life [5] Stay professional [2]	

Table 30: Answers to question 28 in the online survey

The majority of the respondents (73%) replied that they do not ask personal questions before beginning a business meeting with business partners. Most of the reasons listed converge towards the same reason: professional life and private life are two different things. The other reasons include staying professional and listening to others' ideas and opinions. In contrast, among the minority of the respondents (27%), some mentioned that they do ask personal questions in order to make communication easier or to learn more about the person.

29. Do you talk about your private life at work?

	Yes	No	Total
Number of respondents	11	19	30
Total percentage	37%	63%	100%
Motivations	Colleagues are also friends [1] Briefly [1] To build/improve relationships [3] Get familiar with the others [1] To make conversation easier [1]	Professional and private life are separated [6] Unwilling to share [1]	

Table 31: Answers to question 29 in the online survey

63% of all the respondents answered that they do not talk about their private life at work. The main reason mentioned by the respondents is that professional and private life are separate. Among the respondents who answered 'yes' (37%), the reason that was given several times was to build or improve their relationships.

30. If yes, with whom?

	Number of respondents	Total percentage
N/A	2	7%
Colleagues/other employees	18	60%
Superiors	4	13%
Business partners	5	17%

Other	6	20%
	<i>Not specified</i> [4]	
	Friends [1] Does not talk about other things [1]	

Table 32: *Answers to question 30 in the online survey*

For this question, the respondents were able to choose several options. Most of the respondents (60%) who tend to talk about their private life at work selected “with their colleagues or other employees”. 17% talk with their business partners, 13% with their superiors and 7% did not answer that question (N/A). In addition, 20% of the respondents chose “other answer (please specify)” (see Appendix 1), in which four people did not specify their answer, while one mentioned “friends” and another one “does not talk about other things”. It is interesting to note that this person, as well as others (13 people in total), chose to answer this question although they did not reply ‘yes’ to the previous questions.

31. Do you often give gifts in a business context?

	Gift	No gift	Total
Number of respondents	11	19	30
Total percentage	37%	63%	100%
Motivations	Build/improve/maintain relationships [4] Stay friendly [1] It is not seen as a bad thing [1] In order to do business [1]	There is no need [3] Depending on the situation [1] Lack of funds [1] Not really important [1] Company culture [1] Not the way they do business [1]	

Table 33: *Answers to question 31 in the online survey*

Most of the respondents (63%) do not give gifts in a business context. The main reason listed is that there is no need to give gifts in this context. On the other hand, 37% reported giving gifts essentially to build, improve or maintain relationships.

32. If yes, on what occasion?

	Number of respondents	Total percentage
N/A (including 3 yes)	20	67%
In private	3	10%
Generally after the initial meeting and cooperation	1	3%
When making friends	1	3%
Any occasion	1	3%
To say thank you at the end of the cooperation	1	3%
For work or leisure	1	3%
Tea meeting	1	3%
That could be considered as bribery	1	3%
Total	30	100%

Table 34: *Answers to question 32 in the online survey*

This question had to be answered only by the people who answered ‘yes’ to the previous question and was thus not compulsory. As a result, most of the respondents (67%) did not answer it. In addition, the results show that three people who previously answered ‘yes’ chose not to mention the occasion and that two people who previously replied ‘no’ answered that question.

A total of three people (10%) said that they give gifts in private, while all the other answers (cf. Table 34) were mentioned by only one person (3%).

4.2. Discussion

This section aims to address the research questions in order to attempt to provide an answer to each of them, based on the analysis of the data gathered in the theoretical part of this dissertation and the data obtained from the online survey conducted among Chinese people currently working in China. Before discussing the findings, it is important to provide additional information about the online survey that was conducted and to point out some limitations of the methodology used here.

The analysis of the survey data showed that 80% of the respondents were between 18 and 30 years old, which means that most of them might not have had long-term experience in business yet. This hypothesis was then confirmed by the analysis of their working period of time with the company, which revealed that a great majority of the respondents had only been with their company for one year. Although some may well have worked elsewhere before (but there is no information about this), others had probably only just started working (especially the youngest respondents). In short, a number of the respondents may not have had a lot of professional experience. In addition, all the respondents were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese working in China. Only one person had Italian as their native language and was the only one who picked the English version of the online survey, which might suggest that that respondent's proficiency level in Chinese is not very high and that he or she may well provide a different perspective on some aspects of Chinese culture.

As the survey included some qualitative elements, some difficulties and uncertainties appeared during the analysis in terms of classification of the results due to respondents' misunderstandings, inaccuracy in their answers and/or lack of responses to some questions. Answering the question "why" was not compulsory, which gave the respondents a certain freedom to choose whether they wanted to give further explanations for their answers or not. Even though giving them the opportunity to write freely was positive in the sense that it provided more details about their choice, this also led to vague and unclear answers as well as contradictions between their answer and their explanation. Furthermore, as most of the questions could be answered by either a 'yes' or 'no' answer, some people who were in-between justified their answer by, for example, repeating the answer or saying that it depended on the situation. Therefore, during the analysis of the results, the focus was on attempting to provide

a clearer interpretation of the answers in order to give a more consistent overview of the results. However, as most of the answers were in Chinese, it is possible that some of the answers (motivations) were not always accurately translated.

4.2.1. What are the major components in Chinese business culture that influence significantly politeness in the Chinese workplace?

Through this dissertation, two major components in Chinese business culture stuck out among others: relationships ('guanxi') and the notion of 'face'. This first research question will therefore be divided into two parts, one dedicated to relationships ('guanxi') and another to the notion of 'face'. Both parts will examine the data obtained from the theoretical sources and the online survey in order to compare them and observe the similarities and differences in a business context.

Relationships ('Guanxi')

Relationships were described as a crucial element in almost all the sources examined in the theoretical part. China is considered as a collectivistic country in which relationships are considered as a significant component of Chinese culture. Chinese people tend to view themselves as part of large groups rather than separate individuals. The scientific sources pointed out that Chinese people give great importance to building long-term relationships to benefit from mutual exchanges based on trust.

In a business context, building relationships makes it possible to facilitate business transactions and deals and to improve business performance. In addition, respect for hierarchy is a crucial key element of the Confucian values. Loyalty and respect are shown to superiors, older and senior people in the workplace. In the non-scientific sources, relationships are also described as important to build in order to develop trust with business partners. It was mentioned that a strong business relationship can be developed, for instance, by talking about one's private life or participating in activities out of working hours. In most cases, negotiating takes time in order to build relationships with business partners.

The results obtained from the survey showed that most of the respondents (77%) are aware of the Confucian values and tend to apply them in their everyday life, including in the workplace. Trust and loyalty are essentially given to family members. Trust appeared to be the most important element for the majority of the respondents (with a total of 87%) and 83% of the respondents reported that they show respect and loyalty to their superior and older/senior people in their company. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents (87%) take time when negotiating with business partners mainly in order to build relationships. 93% of the respondents consider building relationships as important or very important. When it comes to concessions or favours, the respondents were equally divided (50% for each option) regarding expecting something in return or not. Finally, 77% of the respondents said that they participate in non-work-related activities with their business partners out of working hours mostly in order to improve or strengthen their relationships.

Table 35 hereunder includes a general comparison between the information gathered from the theoretical sources and from the online survey. The table summarises the answers with the biggest percentages of respondents along with the most frequent and common motivations/reasons obtained from the survey.

Element	Theoretical sources	Online survey
Relationships (‘guanxi’)	Concept of relationships is part of the Confucian values. Great importance placed on building relationships with business partners. Negotiations take time to build relationships with business partners, to push them to make concessions or to relay the information to their superiors.	Awareness and application of the Confucian values (77%). Great importance placed on building relationships with business partners (87%). Negotiations take time mostly to build relationships with business partners (87%).

	Building relationships with business partners before negotiating is important.	Building relationships with business partners before negotiating is (very) important (93%).
Trust	Trust is one of the most important elements in Chinese business. Family members are the most trustworthy when doing business.	Trust is the most important element in Chinese business (87%). Family members are the most trustworthy when doing business (67%).
Hierarchy	Respect for hierarchy in the workplace.	Less emphasis on respect for hierarchy in the workplace (50%).
Respect and loyalty	Respect and loyalty towards superior and older/senior people in the company.	Respect and loyalty towards superior and older/senior people in the company (83%).
Exchange of favours	Expectation of something in return when making concessions or doing someone a favour.	50% expect something in return when making concessions or doing someone a favour, while 50% do not.
Extra-activities	Participation in non-work-related activities with business partners out of working hours to build relationships.	Participation in non-work-related activities with business partners out of working hours to build relationships (77%).

Table 35: *Comparison between the theoretical sources and the online survey regarding relationships ('guanxi')*

Some of the answers obtained from the survey converge towards the same statements mentioned in the theoretical sources. Both the online survey and the theoretical sources place great significance on relationships ('guanxi') and taking time to build relationships with business partners before and while negotiating. Participating in extra-activities out of working hours is one common way to build and improve relationships with business partners. Trust is

also considered as one of the most important elements in Chinese business culture, where family members are the most trustworthy people for the Chinese when doing business.

However, a number of differences between the theoretical sources and the online survey could also be observed such as respect for hierarchy. “Respect for hierarchy” was not considered as very important in the workplace by the majority of the respondents, whereas it was described as a key element in the theoretical sources. Question 11 (cf. Table 13) provided a ranking of some Confucian elements, where the respondents (87%) considered “trust” as the most important element in the Chinese workplace and “respect for hierarchy” (50%) as the least important element. As a reminder, the majority of the elements mentioned were mostly given a score between 3 and 5, while “respect for hierarchy” mainly scored between 1 and 4. It was also the element with the highest percentage of respondents who did not answer (50% N/A). These results might be explained by the majority of the respondents being between 18 and 30 years old; their answers may well reflect more recent shifts in the working environment. The type of company the respondents work for may also play a role. For example, start-ups tend to have a flatter structure where employees tend to be more versatile and flexible in their work (20% of all the respondents work in a start-up; cf. Table 9). A lack of work experience could also play a part (cf. Figure 12).

In addition, in terms of respect and loyalty, most of the respondents answered that they always show respect and loyalty to their superior and older/senior people in their company, which seems to contradict the low emphasis on “respect for hierarchy” in question 11 (cf. Table 13). This suggests that most of them still show respect and loyalty in a hierarchy context, although it appears to be the least important element compared to the other elements. Moreover, since this question included older and senior people in a business context, there might be a bigger overlap between the respondents working in a start-up and those working in a state-owned company or other larger organisation. For instance, the people working in a start-up might experience a less strict hierarchy but might still say that they respect older and senior people.

Finally, the exchange of favours and concessions were described several times by the theoretical sources as part of the business context, where something was always expected in return. However, in the survey, half of the respondents (50%) answered that they expect something in return, while the other half (50%) do not. Various answers were given by people expecting something in return such as gratitude or “hoping for the other party to give in next

time”. In contrast, most of the people who do not expect anything in return did not motivate their answer with a specific reason.

In conclusion, most of the results from the survey regarding relationships (‘guanxi’) confirm the significance of building relationships in Chinese business culture. Some clear similarities between the theoretical sources and the survey can clearly be observed while other elements appeared to be more ambiguous (elements that are harder to classify as similar or different from the theoretical sources, such as the exchange of favours).

The Notion of ‘Face’

The notion of ‘face’ is significantly related to the concept of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 61-62) defined ‘face’ as the self-image one has and wants to claim for himself. ‘Face’ can then be lost, maintained, enhanced or saved through different means. A person can also give ‘face’ to the interlocutor (e.g. by complimenting him/her) or make him/her lose ‘face’ (e.g. by criticising him/her). The scientific sources mentioned that the Chinese try to minimise or avoid disrespect or embarrassment in order to avoid causing shame that can result in a loss of ‘face’. Chinese people tend to preserve one’s ‘face’ and avoid any offence or conflict by, for instance, being indirect, avoiding disagreement or public criticism. The non-scientific sources also stated that a loss of ‘face’ can result in ending business relationships or negotiations. Sometimes, Chinese people prefer to refrain from telling their own opinion in order to avoid conflicts. Giving and maintaining ‘face’ are part of the social etiquette and behavioural norms in Chinese business.

The results from the survey showed that most of the respondents (53%) viewed giving, maintaining and saving ‘face’ as important. The same percentage (53%) reported saying ‘no’ outright instead of being more indirect and implicit, while 47% of the respondents try to avoid saying ‘no’ directly. Surprisingly, there is a higher percentage of respondents (60%) trying to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a lower position than someone from a higher position (50%). Furthermore, only 37% claimed to feel embarrassed or ashamed when experiencing disrespect, criticism or disagreement in a business context. Finally, almost half of the respondents (47%) try to immediately solve a conflict during a business meeting while a slight majority (53%) prefer to avoid the conflict.

Table 36 provides an overview of the similarities and differences between some information gathered from the theoretical sources and those obtained from the survey, including the answers with the biggest percentages of respondents.

Element	Theoretical sources	Online survey
Giving/maintaining/saving ‘face’	Great importance of giving/maintaining/saving ‘face’ in Chinese culture.	Importance of giving/maintaining/saving ‘face’ (53%).
Directness and indirectness	Directness is usually avoided.	Directness is mostly preferred (53%).
Disagreement and criticism	Disagreement and criticism are usually avoided.	Disagreement and criticism towards someone from a lower position is mostly avoided (60%). Disagreement and criticism towards someone from a higher position is avoided (50%) and not avoided (50%).
Loss of ‘face’	Disrespect, criticism or disagreement can lead to a feeling of embarrassment or shame.	Disrespect, criticism or disagreement do not lead to a feeling of embarrassment or shame (63%).
Conflicts	Conflicts are avoided during business meetings.	Conflicts are mostly avoided during business meetings (53%).

Table 36: *Comparison between the theoretical sources and the online survey regarding the notion of ‘face’*

As can be seen from table 36, despite some similarities between the theoretical sources and the online survey, there are subtle differences between the similar statements. The notion of ‘face’, involving giving, maintaining and saving ‘face’, is viewed as quite important in the theoretical sources. In the survey, although 53% of the respondents attach importance to it, it might not be

seen as important in relation to the other mentioned elements (that is trust, respect for personal space, relationships, harmony, humility and respect for hierarchy; cf. Table 13, Q. 11). Within those 53%, 34% of the respondents attributed a score within the 3 to 5 range and 29% attributed a score between 0 and 2. Furthermore, 47% of the respondents did not give any score (N/A) for this specific element.

Another similarity is the avoidance of conflicts, despite a small majority of the respondents (53%) stressing this. The avoidance was motivated by different reasons such as to minimise the damage, to improve business activities, to maintain a harmonious relationship, to avoid losing 'face' or as a matter of personality. While those who tend to solve the conflict aim at improving relationships and prevent others from bearing grudges against them. The motivations actually converge towards the same reasons but with different methods. Both solving or avoiding the conflict could help keep harmonious relationships, even though those who want to solve the conflict are more pragmatic than others in the sense that they perceive conflicts as inevitable and consider that it is better to solve them rather than doing nothing. Solving conflicts immediately might then create some temporary inconvenience in the short-run but would prove beneficial in the long-run.

Regarding directness and indirectness, all the theoretical sources stated that indirectness is a significant part of Chinese culture. However, the results of the survey showed that more than half of the respondents (53%) prefer to be straightforward, whereas a slight minority (47%) prefer to avoid being direct. Similarly, disagreement and criticism also resulted in quite close percentages: 60% of the respondents would disagree with and criticise someone from a lower rank and 50% would disagree with and criticise someone from a higher rank. This difference might be explained by the fact that the majority of the respondents do not have that much work experience, as a majority of them (37%) have only been in the company for one year. Therefore, most of them might not have a high position in the company and are more likely to be from a lower rank. This can explain the higher percentage for avoiding disagreement and criticism towards individuals from a lower rank. A larger sample would be needed to confirm the trends observed in this study.

For 63% of the respondents, disrespect, criticism or disagreement do not lead to a feeling of embarrassment or shame, which is usually associated with a loss of 'face'. The most mentioned reason is the need to consider different opinions. This implies that people would not feel

embarrassed or ashamed because someone criticises or disagrees with them as, according to some of the respondents, it is important to take others' points of view into account and not take them personally as an offence in order to improve themselves. Although disrespect, criticism or disagreement can still trigger anger or a feeling that the other person should be ashamed of his or her action, it is not necessarily considered as negative for the majority of the respondents. They prefer to know the truth and make a distinction between work and personal life. On the other hand, among those who feel embarrassed or ashamed, some motivated their answer by expecting mutual respect and recognition or their will to maintain good 'face'. Furthermore, disrespect, criticism or disagreement makes them feel embarrassed or ashamed but also unhappy, which could probably be linked to a feeling of inferiority too. Some of them prefer not to show their embarrassment or shame in public, which could be explained by their personal pride not to lose 'face' in front of their interlocutors.

In conclusion, some similarities and differences can be observed and it is quite striking that the respondents were pretty divided when it came to answering certain questions (e.g. 50% answered 'yes' and the other 50% answered 'no'). Some similarities were found in terms of giving, maintaining and saving 'face' as well as avoiding conflicts, as the notion of 'face' is considered as one important element in the workplace and a small majority of the respondents try to avoid conflicts in business meetings. Concerning the differences, it could be observed that directness was slightly preferred to indirectness in the survey whereas, in the theoretical sources, directness is presented as something that should be highly avoided. Disagreement and criticism seem to be avoided or not according to the context and situation, while it is described as usually avoided in the theoretical sources. Finally, most of the respondents do not experience a loss of 'face' when being contradicted, criticised or disrespected, which were the main causes mentioned in the theoretical sources to a loss of 'face'.

4.2.2. How is politeness manifested in daily operations in the Chinese workplace?

Politeness varies significantly depending on cultures, traditions, customs and social rules. It plays a major role in Chinese business culture and can take various forms. Some of the most common norms of politeness in the Chinese workplace have been pointed out in the theoretical

part of this dissertation, i.e. greeting and saying goodbye, punctuality, mix of private and professional life and exchange of gifts. All of those practices were part of the online survey.

Element	Theoretical sources	Online survey
Respect for personal space	Small perception of personal space.	Importance of respect for personal space (73%).
Greeting and saying goodbye	Handshaking, no body contact or sometimes nodding to greet/say goodbye in a business context.	Handshaking is the most common way (70%) to greet/say goodbye in a business context, followed by nodding (40%).
Punctuality	Punctuality is fundamental in business meetings.	Punctuality is fundamental in business meetings (100%).
Private and professional life	Mix between personal and professional life in business.	No personal questions before beginning a business meeting with business partners (73%). Personal life and private life are separate at work (63%).
Exchange of gifts	Gift-giving is a common practice in China, including in business context.	No gift-giving in business context (63%).

Table 37: Comparison between the theoretical sources and the online survey regarding manners and politeness

Personal Space/Greeting and Saying Goodbye

In the theoretical sources, direct body contact and eye contact are described as disrespectful and rude in some contexts, even though the Chinese have a smaller perception of personal space than Westerners (i.e. they do not necessarily get uncomfortable or offended by physical closeness or loud noise). In business settings, ‘just words’, handshaking and sometimes nodding are the most common forms of greeting or saying goodbye.

In the survey, most of the respondents (73%) value respect for personal space, which influences their way of greeting and saying goodbye. It could be observed that 70% of the respondents

selected handshaking as their way of greeting and saying goodbye in a business context. Another common way is nodding, selected by 40% of the respondents. These two ways correspond to the biggest percentages of respondents obtained from the online survey, while using words (17%), hugging (13%), kissing on the cheek(s) (10%) and other ways (7%) such as waving and bowing received fewer votes.

In short, there are similarities between the theoretical sources and the online survey. Both show that direct body contact is generally avoided by Chinese people. Respect for personal space is important for most of the respondents, which would explain the limited body contact used in greeting and saying goodbye, mostly consisting in handshaking or nodding. Others such as ‘just using words’, hugging, kissing on the cheek(s), waving and bowing are used by very few people.

Punctuality

In the theoretical sources, punctuality was mentioned as a virtue in China. In Chinese business culture, being late for a meeting can be taken for an insult and can damage business relationships. The Chinese highly value punctuality and keeping to schedules is showing respect to the other person.

In the survey, the respondents unanimously stated that arriving on time is important when going to business meetings. Various motivations were provided such as time and punctuality being considered as the most important quality in business, “the great virtue of mankind” and as a way to show respect. The importance of the concept of time and integrity was also mentioned several times.

Punctuality is therefore defined as a crucial element in the Chinese workplace by both the theoretical sources and the online survey. Being on time prevents offending some people and is a way to show respect and integrity. Punctuality is appreciated and considered as normal in Chinese business.

Private and Professional Life

The theoretical sources stated that private life and professional life are often mixed in Chinese business culture. Personal questions can be asked before the beginning of a business meeting with business partners to show interest in them and to build relationships with them. Colleagues can also be considered as family, which often involves private life in a business context.

The results of the survey showed that 73% of the respondents do not report asking personal questions before a business meeting with business partners, mostly because they consider professional life as separate from private life. Other reasons were their desire to listen to others' opinions and ideas related to work and staying professional. Only a small percentage (27%) of the respondents said that they ask personal questions to facilitate the beginning of the meeting, to make the communication easier or to learn more about the business partners.

Regarding talking about private life at work, most of the respondents also claimed not to talk about it as professional life and private life are separate. However, among those who are willing to share their private life at work, the main reason is to build or improve relationships. Other reasons are because they consider their colleagues as friends or as a way to become familiar with the others. The results for question 30 (cf. Table 32) showed that the Chinese mostly share their private life with their colleagues or other employees, which is in line with the idea that colleagues are also considered as friends or family by the majority of the respondents.

To conclude, mixing private life and professional life does not always happen in a business context. The theoretical sources and the online survey seem to differ when it comes to mixing or separating private and professional life. That said, some respondents' answers (not so many) were in line with the statements in the theoretical part. It is important to point out that, in the Chinese workplace, people appear to be more willing to share their private life with their colleagues or other employees, as they can be seen as part of their family or friends.

Exchange of Gifts

According to the theoretical sources, giving gifts is considered as a common practice in China to show hospitality and reinforce business relationships. It involves a series of traditions and

superstitions that have to be taken into account in order to avoid offending Chinese people. However, gift-giving can also be considered as bribery in a business context.

Most of the respondents in the survey (63%) replied that they do not give gifts in a business context. The main reason given is because there is no need to do it. In contrast, 37% of the respondents replied that they give gifts in a business context. Building, improving or maintaining relationships was the main reason cited by the respondents. Various occasions were then specified by some of the respondents (33%). The most frequently mentioned is “in a private context”. It is also interesting to see that one person mentioned that gift-giving could be considered as bribery, which was also mentioned in the theoretical sources.

In conclusion, the survey showed that gift-giving in a business context does not seem to be that common among the Chinese respondents. Therefore, even though it was described as a common Chinese practice, this might not be the case in the current Chinese workplace. However, as gift-giving tends to mostly occur during a business meeting between two different companies, most of the respondents may well have never been in that situation due to their lack of experience or their lower position in the company.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation firstly aimed to analyse and compare scientific sources (books and articles) and non-scientific sources (online articles and blogs) in order to identify similarities and differences between them. Secondly, an online survey was conducted among Chinese people currently working in China. The questions of the online survey were related to the findings of the theoretical part of this dissertation in order to analyse and compare them with the data obtained from the survey in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. *What are the major components in Chinese business culture that influence significantly politeness in the Chinese workplace?*
2. *How is politeness manifested in daily operations in the Chinese workplace?*

Regarding the first research questions, the theoretical sources showed that codes of politeness in the Chinese workplace involve two major components: relationships ('guanxi') and the notion of 'face'. Great importance is placed on social relations and memberships in various groups; building and maintaining relationships are presented as essential. The Confucian values are also deeply rooted in Chinese culture, including a strong respect for hierarchy and trust in family members, although respect for hierarchy might be experiencing some changes in modern society. The results of the survey showed that the decisions of the leader are not always respected if wrong. Besides a handful differences, both the theoretical sources and the online survey showed that the importance of relationships is significantly reflected in the Chinese workplace. Chinese business people tend to focus on building relationships before and while conducting negotiations with business partners. As a consequence, the Chinese have a tendency to take time in terms of negotiations. Building relationships in the Chinese workplace can be achieved through different means. The most commonly mentioned in the theoretical sources were returning a favour, giving gifts and/or participating in non-work-related activities with business partners. However, in the survey, most of the respondents do not seem to expect anything in return when doing a favour and do not necessarily give gifts in a business context. That said, a great majority of them do participate in non-work-related activities out of working hours, mostly to improve their relationships with their business partners. Another common practice mentioned in the theoretical sources was to ask business partners personal questions

before starting a business meeting while, on the other hand, this practice was, on the whole, not adopted by the survey respondents as they consider private and professional life as two distinct elements. Showing interest in business partners and intending to build relationships with them require various polite behaviours and practices, which means that relationships are a major component of politeness in the Chinese workplace.

The notion of 'face' is considered as the second major component influencing politeness in the Chinese workplace. The theoretical sources described 'face' as one key element that needs to be taken into account when doing business. As part of collectivistic cultures, emotions and feelings are usually put aside in Chinese culture to avoid causing a loss of 'face', which could considerably damage business relationships. These concerns for 'face' greatly influence an individual's way of speaking or acting in social interactions. Different behaviours and attitudes can be adopted to give, maintain or saving one's 'face' such as giving compliments, being indirect and avoiding any conflict, criticism and disagreement, which could result in a feeling of embarrassment or shame. Nevertheless, the online survey uncovered mixed answers showing slight differences with a tendency to directness, disagreement and criticism towards someone from a higher position, and no loss of 'face' when experiencing disrespect, criticism or disagreement. However, both the theoretical sources and the online survey showed that preserving one's honour and dignity is one of the main drivers in social interactions. Giving, maintaining and saving 'face' seem therefore to remain crucial in Chinese business and cannot be neglected.

Concerning the second research question, politeness can be manifested in the Chinese workplace through various practices. This dissertation only focused on some of the most common codes of politeness in connection with greeting and saying goodbye, punctuality, private and professional life and exchange of gifts. The comparison made between the theoretical sources and the online survey showed a number of similarities and differences. Body contact is commonly avoided, which goes along with general respect for one's personal space. Handshakes and nodding are the traditional way to greet people in Chinese business culture. Punctuality is considered as a great virtue, quality, and as part of one's integrity. Being on time and sticking to schedules is a way to show respect to the respondents in a meeting, while being late can be seen as rude and offensive. The separation between one's private and professional life can vary according to the circumstances and contexts. On the one hand, the theoretical sources asserted that the Chinese tend to mix them both. For example, in a business context, it

is common practice to ask business partners personal questions before starting a meeting. On the other hand, the survey showed that most of the respondents were mostly unwilling to share their private life with their business partners and more willing to share it with their colleagues, as they are sometimes considered as part of their family or friends. Finally, offering gifts in a business context seems to be a more ambiguous matter: considered by some as appropriate and can be used to thank or mark the end of a business negotiation for example, whereas it can be seen as unnecessary or inappropriate for some others in a business context. The specific situations and contexts are therefore usually the main factors that influence the suitability of giving gifts in Chinese business, where one has to be careful and aware of the possibility that gifts can be seen as bribery.

Some limitations were discussed during the analysis of the survey results due to the methodology that was used. Since surveys often do not provide the respondents with the ability to further motivate their answers, just providing them with a binary choice can limit their opinion and lead to inaccuracy. Although the online survey conducted within the framework of this dissertation included some qualitative aspects by giving the respondents the opportunity to motivate their answers, some reasons led to contradictions and/or ambiguities. In addition, the lack of information about the respondents' work experience has undoubtedly influenced the results. Surveys give researchers access to what the respondents say they do or value, for example. Observing employees' behaviours in their workplace could then provide interesting insights into what they actually do and say.

Codes of politeness in the Chinese workplace involve a multitude of different behaviours, acts and practices that are linked to and part of Chinese culture. This dissertation was based on diverse scientific articles and books as well as online articles and blogs that provided a wide variety of data. The scope of the research had to be limited to the elements that stuck out the most from the sources analysed in the theoretical part, which were analysed with a sample of 30 survey respondents. Replicating the survey with a larger number of respondents would be the next step to see if the observations are confirmed or not, especially when it comes to respect for hierarchy, directness, disagreement and criticism. These elements could have been undergoing slight changes over time and would be interesting to study in some further research.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONS: ENGLISH VERSION

As part of my master's dissertation regarding the codes of politeness in the Chinese workplace, I am conducting a survey about the current cultural rules, values and customs that are applied in Chinese businesses.

My survey concerns mostly business people currently working in China, but also those who have worked in China or have had any other experience of doing business with Chinese people.

All the answers provided will be anonymous.

1) Age:

- 18-25 years old
- 25-30 years old
- 30-35 years old
- 35-40 years old
- 40-45 years old
- 45-50 years old
- 50-55 years old
- 55-60 years old
- 60 or + years old

2) Gender:

-

3) Native language:

-

4) Native country:

-

5) Working country:

-

6) Type of company you are working in (e.g. multinational, start-up, etc.):

-

7) Which field is your company operating in (e.g. IT, marketing, import-export, etc)?

-

8) Job position in the company:

-

9) For how long have you been working at the company?

-

10) If you are not working in China anymore, for how long did you work with Chinese business people? In which context?

-

CHINESE CULTURE

11) Which element(s) below is/are the most important at your workplace? To what extent are they important (on a scale from 0 to 5, 0 = lowest and 5 = highest)?

- Relationships ('guanxi')
- Giving/saving/maintaining 'face'
- Respect for hierarchy
- Trust (between co-workers, leader, business partners, etc.)
- Respect for personal space (no body contact)
- Humility (being modest, avoiding criticism and conflict, etc.)
- Harmony

12) Are you aware of the Confucian values (harmony, respect, humility, loyalty, etc.)?

Do you apply them in your everyday life, including at your workplace?

- Yes, I am aware of them and I apply them
- Yes, I am aware of them but I don't apply them
- No, I am not aware of them

13) Do you always show respect and loyalty to your superior and older/senior people in the company?

- Yes
- No

14) Who do you trust the most and stay the most loyal to when doing business?

- Your family members
- Your superior(s)
- Your colleagues
- The older people in the company
- The senior people in the company
- Other answer (please specify):

RELATIONSHIPS

15) When doing business, do you always try to build relationships with business partners?

- Yes, building relationships is very important at the workplace.
- No, there is no need to build a relationship in business contexts.

16) Do you take your time when negotiating with business partners?

- Yes, negotiations take time.
- No, negotiations are short.

17) If yes, for which reason?

- To build relationships with my business partners.
- To push the other party to make concessions.

- To relay the information to the leaders to make a decision.
- Other reasons (please specify):

18) How important is it to take time to build relationships before negotiating with business partners?

- Very important
- Important
- Not so important
- Not important at all

19) When you make a concession or do someone a favour, do you expect something in return?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

20) Do you participate in (non-work-related) activities with your business partners out of working hours?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

THE NOTION OF ‘FACE’

21) Do you prefer to say ‘no’ outright (directly and frankly) or in a more indirect and implicit way?

- I prefer to say ‘no’ outright.
- I prefer to avoid saying ‘no’ outright and find a way to say it more implicitly and/or indirectly.

22) Do you try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a lower position (e.g. your subordinate) in a business meeting?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

23) Do you try to avoid disagreeing with and/or criticising someone from a higher position (e.g. your manager) in a business meeting?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

24) Do you usually feel embarrassed or ashamed if someone disrespects you, criticises you or disagrees with you in a business context?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

25) When there is a conflict during a business meeting, do you tend to avoid it or to solve it immediately?

- Solve the conflict immediately, why?
- Avoid the conflict, why?

MANNERS AND POLITENESS

26) How do you greet/say goodbye to people?

- Handshaking
- Hugging
- Kissing on the cheek(s)
- Nodding the head
- No gesture at all, just using words
- Other (please specify):

27) Is it important to arrive on time at business meetings?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

28) Do you usually ask personal questions before beginning a business meeting with business partners?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

29) Do you talk about your private life at work?

- Yes, why?
- No, why?

30) If yes, with whom?

- My colleagues/other employees
- My boss/superior/manager
- Any business partners
- Other answer (please specify):

31) Do you often give gifts in a business context?

- Yes, context? Why?
- No, why?

32) If yes, on what occasion?

-

33) Would do you agree to be contacted afterwards for additional questions? If yes, please specify your email address:

-

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete the survey.

Your responses and the information you have provided will contribute a lot to my research and analysis for my master's dissertation.

Should you have any questions or difficulties, please do not hesitate to contact me by email.

SURVEY QUESTIONS: CHINESE VERSION

本人正在进行撰写主题为职场礼仪的硕士论文。

此调查问卷是论文调查的一部分，具体关于中国企业当前的文化规则，价值观和习俗。调查的对象主要为在中国工作，或任何与中国人有贸易往来的在职商务人士。

所有回答将匿名。

1. 年级 [单选题] *

- ☐ 18-25 岁
- ☐ 25-30 岁
- ☐ 30-35 岁
- ☐ 35-40 岁
- ☐ 40-45 岁
- ☐ 45-50 岁
- ☐ 50-55 岁
- ☐ 55-60 岁
- ☐ 60 岁或以上

2. 性别 [单选题] *

- ☐ 男
- ☐ 女

3. 母语 [填空题] *

4. 国籍 [填空题] *

5. 工作国家 [填空题] *

6. 你工作的公司类型（如跨国公司，初创公司等） [填空题] *

7. 行业（如 IT，营销，进出口等） [填空题] *

8. 职位 [填空题] *

9. 在公司已工作多长时间？ [填空题] *

10. 如果您已不再在中国工作：您曾与中国商人合作多久了？在何种情况下？ [填空题]

11. 以下哪个因素（可多选）是在您的工作场所最重要的？ 请您用数字 0 到 5 表示重要程度（0 =最低，5 = 最高）？ [多选题] *

☐ 关系 _____ *

☐ 给面子/留面子/维持面子 _____ *

☐ 尊重公司等级制度（hierarchy） _____ *

☐ 信任（同事，上司，合作伙伴等之间） _____ *

☐ 尊重个人空间（无身体接触） _____ *

☐ 谦卑（谦虚，避免批评和冲突等） _____ *

☐ 和谐 _____ *

12. 你是否意识到儒家的价值观（和谐，尊重，谦逊，忠诚等）？您是否在日常生活中应用它们，包括在您的工作场所？ [单选题] *

☐ 是的，我知道并应用

☐ 是的，我知道但我没应用

☐ 不，我不知道他们

13. 您是否始终对上司和前辈表示尊重和忠诚？ [单选题] *

☐ 是的

☐ 不

14. 做生意时您最信任谁并对谁保持最忠实？ [多选题] *

- ☐ 你的家人
- ☐ 你的老板
- ☐ 你的同事
- ☐ 公司里更年长的
- ☐ 公司里经验更丰富的
- ☐ 其他答案： _____

15. 在做生意时，您是否总是尝试与业务合作伙伴建立关系？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 是的，在工作场所建立关系非常重要
- ☐ 不，没有必要在商业合作中建立关系

16. 您是否在与商业伙伴谈判时花时间？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 是的，谈判需要时间
- ☐ 不，谈判很短暂

17. 如果是，为什么？ [多选题]

- ☐ 与我的业务合作伙伴建立关系
- ☐ 促使对方做出让步
- ☐ 为了收集信息让上司做出决定
- ☐ 其他原因（请注明） _____

18. 在与业务合作伙伴谈判之前花时间建立关系有多重要？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 很重要
- ☐ 重要
- ☐ 不是那么重要
- ☐ 根本不重要

19. 当你做出让步或帮助别人时，你期待回报吗？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 有，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 没有，为什么？ _____

20. 您是否在工作时间之外与业务合作伙伴一起参加（与工作无关的）活动？如果是，为什么？

[单选题] *

- ☐ 是的，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 不，永远不会。为什么？ _____

21. 你更愿意直接坦率还是者以间接隐含的方式说‘不’？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 我更喜欢直接说“不”
- ☐ 我避免直截了当说‘不’，并尝试找一种更隐蔽的方式间接说出来

22. 你是否尽量避免不同意和/或批评别人职位比你低的人（例如你的下属）？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 是，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 没有，为什么？ _____

23. 您是否试图避免对更高职位的人（例如您的经理）产生不同意见和/或批评？ [多选题] *

- ☐ 是，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 没有，为什么？ _____

24. 您会经常感到有人不同意您，不尊重您而让您感到尴尬或羞愧吗？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 是，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 没有，为什么？ _____

25. 商务中，您是否倾向避免还是立即解决冲突？ [单选题] *

- ☐ 立即解决冲突，为什么？ _____
- ☐ 避免冲突，为什么？ _____

26. 你怎么问候/说再见？ [多选题] *

- ☐ 握手
- ☐ 拥抱
- ☐ 亲吻脸颊
- ☐ 点头
- ☐ 没有任何手势，只是使用文字
- ☐ 其他： _____

27. 在商务会议上准时到达是否重要? [单选题] *

☐ 是的, 为什么? _____

☐ 没有, 为什么? _____

28. 在与业务合作伙伴开始商务会议之前, 您是否经常提出个人问题? [单选题] *

☐ 是, 为什么? _____

☐ 没有, 为什么? _____

29. 你会在工作中谈及私生活吗? [单选题] *

☐ 是, 为什么? _____

☐ 不, 为什么? _____

30. 如果是的话, 和谁在一起? [多选题] *

☐ 我的同事/其他员工

☐ 我的老板/上级/经理

☐ 任何商业伙伴

☐ 其他答案: _____

31. 商务场合中, 你经常送礼物吗? [单选题] *

☐ 是的, 为什么? _____

☐ 没有, 为什么? _____

32. 如果是的话, 在什么场合? [填空题]

33. 您是否同意后续关于其他问题联系到您? 如果是, 请说明您的电子邮件地址: [填空题]

非常感谢您抽出宝贵的时间来完成调查!

你的回答和你提供信息将有助于我的研究和完成硕士论文。

如果您有任何疑问, 欢迎通过电子邮件与我联系.

ONLINE SURVEY: RESULTS

Types of Company (cf. Table 9, p. 49)

Type of company	Number of respondents	Total percentage
Start-up	6	20,0%
State-owned company	5	16,7%
Multinational	5	16,7%
Educational institution	2	6,7%
Private company	2	6,7%
Multi-channel network	1	3,3%
Administrative unit	1	3,3%
Medium company	1	3,3%
Hospital	1	3,3%
Metrology institute	1	3,3%
Foreign company	1	3,3%
Multi-Channel Network organisation	1	3,3%
Large private company	1	3,3%
School-run private company	1	3,3%
Law firm	1	3,3%
Total	30	100%

Working Field (cf. Table 10, p. 50)

Working field	Number of respondents	Total percentage
Education	3	10%
Import and export	2	6,7%
Manufacturing	2	6,7%
Media	2	6,7%
Government	1	3,3%
Internet	1	3,3%
Fast-moving consumer goods	1	3,3%
Home appliance	1	3,3%
Economic consulting	1	3,3%
Clothing trade	1	3,3%
Medical hygiene	1	3,3%
Bank	1	3,3%
Environmental protection	1	3,3%
Marketing	1	3,3%
Retail	1	3,3%
Finance	1	3,3%
Engineering	1	3,3%
Financial insurance	1	3,3%
Geographic information system, mapping	1	3,3%
Clothing marketing	1	3,3%
Energy	1	3,3%
Fashion	1	3,3%
Culture, high-tech industry	1	3,3%
Microelectronic technology	1	3,3%
Investment	1	3,3%
TOTAL	30	100%

Period of time in the company (cf. Figure 12, p. 52)

Period of time	Number of respondents	Total percentage
1.5 week	1	3,3%
1 month	1	3,3%
2 months	1	3,3%
3 months	2	6,7%
5 months	1	3,3%
1 year	10	33,3%
1.5 year	1	3,3%
2 years	4	13,3%
3 years	2	6,7%
4 years	1	3,3%
5 years	1	3,3%
9 years	1	3,3%
15 years	1	3,3%
16 years	1	3,3%
25 years	1	3,3%
32 years	1	3,3%
Total	30	100%

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