



Practices of Chinese Businesspersons for Saving Addresser-oriented Face in Intercultural Communication

Guo Xiaoxi^{a*} , Mahani Binti Stapa^b 

^a*Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Email: gxiaoxi88@gmail.com*

^b*Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Email: m-mahani@utm.my*

Received 25 October 2022 | Received in revised form 27 December 2022 | Accepted 28 January 2023

APA Citation:

Xiaoxi, G., Stapa, M. B. (2022). Practices of Chinese Businesspersons for Saving Addresser-oriented Face in Intercultural Communication. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 260-269.
Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.803021>

Abstract

In Chinese culture the concept of ‘face’ refers to the “dignity” or “prestige” of an individual that must be protected or saved, particularly in inter-cultural communication. This study aimed to examine how addressers inevitably save their own face in inter-cultural communication and what different strategies of ‘face’ saving have a bearing on their linguistic behaviors. A mixed method research design, in two stages was conducted wherein a questionnaire was utilized in the first stage (quantitative) and a semi-structured interview in the second stage (qualitative). The questionnaire examined the situations of saving the addresser's face while the interview examined the strategies of saving addresser's face. The sample comprised 120 business persons for the quantitative phase, and 15 randomly selected from the 120 respondents for the interview. The findings show that when addressers' face is hurt or threatened, such as when they report their mistakes and are refused, they will apply face saving strategies including apology, admitting, finding excuses and justification, and pretending nothing severe and showing they can handle the problem. . It was also found that Chinese businesspersons can protect self-face when they report their mistakes and poor performance to their superiors, peers, and subordinates in intercultural communication. These findings can guide people from other countries to better understand Chinese businesspersons' communication processes and their smooth and effective intercultural communication.

© 2022 EJAL & the Authors. Published by Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics (EJAL). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Keywords: face-saving; addresser's face; politeness; intercultural communication, China

Introduction

In Chinese culture and interpersonal relationships, the concept of ‘face’, AKA *mianzi* (mi-an-ze), refers to the “dignity” or “prestige” of an individual that must be protected in all kinds of interactions (Cardon, 2004; Cardon & Scott, 2003). Hence, ‘saving an addresser-oriented face’ would mean to make sure that others do not lose respect for one nor should feel the embarrassment. ‘Losing face’ in China is said to be caused by embarrassment, disagreement, or criticism. ‘Losing face’ is equal to losing the respect of others, and avoiding this situation (‘saving face’) is very important in Chinese culture. In the workplace, such tactics are used to avoid ‘losing face’, and ‘save face’ (Cardon, 2009). This can be greatly linked to the ideas of orientalism, although understanding this from a western viewpoint can be difficult (Hou, 2022).

* Corresponding Author.

Email : gxiaoxi88@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.803021>

When interacting with foreign culture, the Chinese culture teaches its people to 'save face' or do whatever they can to retain the respect of others (Cardon & Scott, 2003). This requires a Chinese to act differently with their business associates, peers, public officials and so on in a foreign land, compared to how they would behave with their family and friends in their home country. Likewise, for foreigners, especially the western people regard face as a metaphor and much of business success depends on addressing face appropriately in business relationship. The 'face' metaphor, when doing business with the Chinese, symbolizes prestige, status, dignity, and respect.

The constantly changing business environment in China, owing to digitalization and AI-enabled technology, needs a western businessman to be agile and flexible while dealing with their Chinese counterparts. The Chinese-Western negotiations have been rightly described in these words: "Face and other frequently mentioned Chinese cultural traits. [are] a myth. Foreign business people should learn both to practice them and to distance themselves from them." (Fang, 1999). Since the Chinese hierarchy is vertical and respectful, both in business and privacy, the Chinese are highly concerned to save "face" and protect their personal reputation and dignity. The qualities valued by the Chinese include "saving and giving face," and modesty in personal as well as business relationships. It helps them particularly in maintaining intercultural communication and good relationships with key business contacts and government officials. Additionally, Chinese business culture is largely influenced by Confucianism, which implies that their business relationship network is based on values such as solidarity, loyalty, modesty and above all, politeness.

Politeness is one of the most important and active research areas in language use. Studies apply politeness theory to different cultures (e.g. Holmes (1988); Scollon and Scollon (1994)), investigating cultural-specific concepts and strategies of politeness (Lounis, 2014). These studies have defined politeness in different ways, but they all stress politeness to others and save the addressee's face and entirely ignoring the addresser's face in this process, which is ineluctably involved in communication (Stewart, 2008); Yule (2005). further defined politeness as the methods used to show awareness of the addressee's face. Face is defined as "self-esteem" that one has, and maintaining of respect in public or in private (Goffman, 1967). Brown and Levinson (1987) had proposed a politeness theory and initiated the face-threaten acts (FATs) based politeness study. They had claimed that politeness strategies should be employed to save the addressee's face.

Brown and Levinson (1987) further divided face into two separate parts as positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the want to be approved of and negative face refers to the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions. These two desires or faces want to guide people's polite linguistic behaviors. This echoes the Sapir and Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), which rightly suggested that the structure of a language determines the thought and perception of its speakers. Hence, linguistic politeness in the Chinese language and culture plays a vital role in transmitting culture.

Face has been studied widely by scholars from different countries as an essential factor of politeness. However, face is far more than a factor of politeness in China; in fact, it is a significant cultural phenomenon in the Chinese society. Hence, although there is something in common between face studied in politeness and face as a cultural factor in China, they have significant differences. Cardon (2009) has rightly stated that "politeness tradition is a starting point for understanding differences between cultures but quite limited in describing specific cultures (p 36)." However, face in China has significant differences from face studied in politeness theory. One of the differences is that apart from saving addressee's face, the Chinese always pay attention to saving addresser's face and the addresser even tries to vie for face in front of others. In contrast, politeness theories studied universally focus only on saving addressees' face

A study to examine face saving practices of Chinese businesspersons for the addresser's face has been a much felt need for several reasons. First, there is a need to investigate exploring what the addressers say and acts in different contexts; secondly, the role of face in Chinese business culture was needed to be established as many foreign businesspersons are confused by apparently contradictory behavior of their Chinese counterparts in terms of respect and politeness. Most foreign businesspersons, however, are aware of the importance of saving face in the Chinese culture but they lack the understanding of other behaviors related to face (Blackman, 1997, 2000; Cardon, 2004; Leung, Wong, & Tam, 2003; Pan, 2000a, 2000b). Moreover, there is a dearth of research addressing the role of face in Chinese business culture, particularly to examine the interactions between Chinese and Westerners (Cardon, 2004; Leung & Chan, 2003; Zhai, 1995; Zuo, 1997).

To achieve these objectives and fill the research gap, this study concentrated on how Chinese businesspersons can save their own face when communicating with people from other countries. The following two questions were framed for this purpose:

1. What are the situations of Chinese businesspersons saving addresser's face in intercultural communication?
2. What are the strategies applied by Chinese businesspersons to save addresser's face in intercultural communication?

Literature Review

Research on 'face' in the Chinese context began in 1944, when [Hu \(1944\)](#) published his paper "The Chinese concept of 'face'", which has inspired many studies since then. [Watts \(2003\)](#) claims that 'face' research is now a field on its own and already being juxtaposed in politeness research. A few studies even apply politeness theories to China's society to study 'face' as a cultural issue in China ([Kádár & Mills, 2011](#)). This has made 'face' in politeness research common with 'face' in China's society. However, in spite of these two versions, some characteristics of 'face' in China are still missing in the research domain. One of the key missing elements is that face studied in politeness emphasizes saving addressees' face, while being polite to others; hence, saving self-face remains a critical characteristics of face studies in China.

[Goffman \(1955\)](#) introduced face in the research domain, and defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes." [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) defined face as "the public self-image every member wants to claim for himself." It shows people's desire to present themselves in a good way and the presence of an intention to protect their own face. They define politeness by taking into account of addressers' need to mitigate the imposition inherent in speech acts ([Brown & Levinson, 1987](#)). It is obvious that their concepts of face and politeness circled on how addressers save addressee's face and avoid others losing face.

In the context of China, face is widely defined and classified. For instance, Chinese scholar, [Zhai \(2010\)](#) defined moral face as "a unique characteristic of the Chinese character and has the connotation of self-respect and a sense of shame", which he also called "a type of relationship Chinese hope for and has the connotation of self-display and hypocritical display in hopes of gaining the favorable evaluation of others". Accordingly, the concept of face in China differs from that of politeness theory. [Yule \(2005\)](#) proposed that politeness is "showing awareness and consideration of another person's face." Acts or utterances of an individual can cause face loss of others, which are called face-threatening acts, which can be minimized by "politeness strategies" proposed by [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) and lessen the face loss effect. This is consistent with [Song \(2012\)](#), who also claimed that proper politeness strategies are needed to deal with face-threatening acts and save the addressee's face.

The majority of studies on face-saving acts and strategies are oriented to addressees' face instead of addressers' face. For example, many scholars construct the theories of politeness based on the concept of face, such as [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#); [Leech \(2014\)](#) and, who claimed that the purpose of politeness is to save other's face. [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) claimed that the acts that threaten the face of addressers or addressees are Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). They further proposed five super strategies to guide people on how to avoid FTAs and save other's face, including (a) bald on-record strategy, (b) positive politeness strategy, (c) negative politeness strategy, (d) off-record strategy, and (e) do not do FTAs. Factors influencing the choice of these strategies are also stated in their research, including D (social distance), P (power of addressee over addresser), and R(imposition of FTA in that culture) ([Brown & Levinson, 1987](#)). The more social distance between the addresser and the addressee, the more power the addressee over the addresser, and the more imposing the FTA in the culture, the more effort the addresser will make to mitigate the degree of face-threatening acts, namely, to save other's face. When looking closely into [Brown and Levinson's](#) politeness theory, it is apparent that the strategies and factors they proposed are the addresser's acts to save the addressee's face. At the same time, it cannot explain what the addresser will do to save their own face when their face is threatened.

The few exceptions in research based on saving addresser-oriented face deal with aspects of image reparation or reputation defense. For example, previous research on saving addresser-oriented face focuses on identifying various persuasive strategies and their effectiveness ([Benoit, 1995](#); [Burns & Bruner, 2000](#); [Coombs & Holladay, 2008](#); [Sheldon & Sallot, 2008](#)). Besides, saving the addresser-oriented face is always treated as reputation defense as [Naderi and Hirst \(2017\)](#) proposed reputation defense strategies, including denial, excuses, justification, and concession by manual annotation analysis of data from Parliament. These studies have although touched on the addresser-oriented face, but they treat the addresser-oriented face as either addresser's image or reputation, which is neither the accurate concept of face in politeness nor the Chinese concept of face. Hence, saving addresser-oriented face, especially in the Chinese context, should be further studied as an exclusive subject.

[Chen and Lunt \(2021\)](#) mentioned save-self face as one of the characteristic of face practices in China by studying self-presentation and face in Chinese and West European contexts. Besides, many Chinese scholars also proposed various face practices, including giving face, protecting face, and vying for face ([Hwang & Hwang, 2012](#); [Jia, 2001](#); [Tao, 1994](#); [Zhai, 1995](#); [Zuo, 1997](#)). [Zhu \(1989\)](#) further claimed the practices of getting face back and avoiding losing face, emphasizing the addresser's face instead of the addressee's face. Abundant research focuses on self-face about luxury brand consumption, and the consumption behavior extensively attached to saving and increasing self-face of Chinese (e.g., [Hung, Qiu Zhang, Guillet, and Wang \(2020\)](#); [Yu, Liu, and Niu \(2019\)](#)). Hence, the Chinese pay great attention to one's own face in daily life.

Chen (1993) proposed that the addressers are motivated to enhance their own public image by investigating the data of Chinese addressers' compliment responding behavior and their food offering conversation (Chen, 1993). In addition, some other scholars who studied the Chinese concept of face also mentioned saving self-face. Cardon (2004) studied the role of face in Chinese business culture, involving major face practices such as giving face, protecting face, vying for face, and not considering face. With the help of authentic examples and a model of face practices the study proposed a few strategies based on business relationships: horizontal insiders, vertical insiders, and outsiders. These strategies explained the scenarios like the role of face in business situations; how Chinese businesspersons give and protect face for each other when working with foreign businesspersons, and like.

Likewise, several recent studies have devised systematic theories to study the addresser's effort to save the face of the addressee (Agustina, 2021; Ningsih, Boeriswati, & Muliastuti, 2020; Purnomo, 2020). These theories are applied widely in different fields and contexts. For example, these studies show how teachers save face of their students in the class. These studies also proposed multiple strategies for saving other's face. Watts (2003) claimed that to be polite in language, people might use indirect speech acts, address others using a respectful tone, or utilize polite utterances such as please, sorry, or thank you. Nair (2019) conducted an ethnographic study of diplomats based on 13 consecutive months of fieldwork and granted a distinct conceptual space to face-saving in international relations. All these studies show that saving addressee-oriented face is studied widely in different fields and lesser on the issue of saving addresser-oriented face.

In conclusion, therefore, saving the addressee's face is studied widely in different fields, while saving the addresser's face is largely neglected in previous research. It is also evident that face is still an under-researched subject as a cultural element, rather than element to study politeness, because much attention has been paid on politeness study by previous researchers while little attention has given to face as a cultural element. In addition, there are lack of research studies concentrating on addresser's face, with research in addressee's face both in cultural and politeness study dominating and minimal research in addresser's face. Besides, the Chinese significantly emphasize face in their daily communication. Once their face need is ignored by others, it would be difficult to obtain smooth communication and harmonious relationship (Hou, 2022). Therefore, the addresser's face practices should be explored by investigating the situations of the addresser conducting face practices and their face strategies in their discourse behavior.

Methodology

The current study concentrates on saving addresser-oriented face when Chinese businesspersons communicate with people from other countries in intercultural communication. Being a mixed method research, this study was carried out in two stages. The Quantitative stage, which focused on the situations of saving the addresser's face, used a questionnaire. The qualitative phase, which studied strategies of saving addresser's face, used a semi-structured interview. This mixed-method sequential explanatory research design was used with quantitative stage preceding the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003). In this research, the quantitative research was conducted in the first phrase to get the general understanding of the situations causing saving addresser's face, and qualitative research provided the detail of more situations and strategies of saving addresser's face for the statistical results through researching participants' view in depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Two instruments were used in this research to determine situations and strategies for saving addresser-oriented face. First, a questionnaire was used to investigate the situations of saving addressers' face in intercultural communication. The questionnaire was self-made based on Cardon (2004)'s study in which he proposed two situations for protecting addressers' face, including making mistakes and being refused by interviewing Chinese businesspersons. He further claimed that the degree of saving self-face differs among various social statuses.

The participants of the current study were Chinese businesspersons from 3 international companies who had the experience of communicating with people from other countries for over one year in English. These employees were all Chinese native-speakers and communicated with people in English from other countries who did not know Chinese. The research targeted the mainland Chinese (where people's mother tongue was Chinese, and working language was English, Taiwan, Hong Kong. The overseas Chinese and the Chinese who were the non-native speakers were not included in this research. A total of 120 participants were selected for the quantitative phase to respond to the questionnaire. The questionnaire data was analyzed by descriptive statistical analysis, and percentages and means were calculated. The percentage method was used to determine whether a particular situation can cause the practice of saving self-face, and the mean was used to compare which situation can cause more saving self-face practices.

On the other hand, in the qualitative phase, the interview method was used. A semi-structured interview was adopted, with a self-made question sheet, to investigate other situations causing saving addressers' face and strategies for saving self-face when Chinese businesspersons communicated with people from other countries. The participants of the interview included fifteen Chinese businesspersons randomly selected from

the 120 respondents of the questionnaire. There were three sets of questions in the interview: (1) Did you have the experience of protecting self-face when you communicate with people from other countries at work? Do you often protect your own face in intercultural communication? (2) In what kinds of situations will you protect your own face? Can you describe the experience? (3) What do you usually do to protect your own face when communicating with people from other countries? The interview was conducted in Chinese, and the data was transcribed, translated, and double-checked by two translators from China. The data were analyzed with thematic analysis according to the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Results and Discussion

In this section, qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed separately, with quantitative data analyzed first, followed by qualitative data. Regarding questionnaire data, 6 items were analyzed to investigate the possibility of protecting self-face in different situations. Table 1 shows the percentage and mean of protecting self-face in different situations.

Table 1. *protecting self-face in different situations*

No	Situations	N	Percentage				Mean	SD
			Very likely	likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely		
1.	When I report my mistake to my foreign superior face to face, I will look for excuses to protect my face.	312	13.14	73.71	9.93	3.20	2.968	0.599
2.	When I report my mistake to my foreign peer face to face, I will look for excuses to protect my face.	312	11.21	76.92	9.29	2.56	2.968	0.555
3.	When I report my mistake to my foreign subordinate face to face, i will look for excuses to protect my face.	312	12.17	74.67	10.57	2.56	2.965	0.574
4.	When I was refused by my foreign superior face to face, i will pretend nothing to protect my face.	312	16.98	71.47	8.97	2.56	3.029	0.602
5.	When I was refused by my foreign superior face to face, i will pretend nothing to protect my face.	312	17.94	72.11	6.41	3.52	3.045	0.620
6.	When I was refused by my foreign superior, i will pretend nothing to protect my face.	312	13.14	73.39	10.89	2.56	2.971	0.586

It is evident from Table 1 that Chinese businesspersons may protect self-face when they report their mistakes and poor performance to their superiors, peers, and subordinates in intercultural communication. Table 1 shows that the percentage of a positive statement is all over 70%, which means Chinese businesspersons protect self-face in all these six situations. The first six items described reporting their mistakes in different situations. The data shows that Chinese businesspersons protect self-face when they report their mistakes in intercultural communication. For example, 13.14% of the respondents were very likely to protect, and 73.71% were unlikely. In comparison, 9.93% were unlikely, and 3.20% are very unlikely to protect self-face when they reported their mistakes to their foreign superior in intercultural communication. As a result, the findings showed that Chinese businesspersons always protected their own face when they reported their mistakes to their superiors, peers or subordinates in intercultural communication.

Face is the assessment to an individual from others, and the content of the assessment include one's achievements, accomplishments and obedience to the social order. When others assume a positive assessment, the person gains face. If others assume a negative assessment, the person loses face. According to this definition, individuals do not have a constant presentation of face. An individual's face varies with the situation (Goffman, 1955). Reporting one's mistakes may cause negative evaluations from others, because revealing one's mistakes is showing limited ability to others, which can cause severe damage to self-image and thus, lose face. As a result, when Chinese businesspersons report their mistakes, they would like to save their own face in the fear of losing their own face in front of others in intercultural communication.

In addition, the data also revealed that Chinese businesspersons protect self-face when they are refused in different situations. The data shows that they protect self-face when they are refused in intercultural communication. 16.98% of the respondents were very likely, and 71.47% were likely, while 8.97% were unlikely and 2.56% were very unlikely to protect self-face when their foreign superior refused in intercultural communication. The same trend can be seen when they were refused by their foreign peers and subordinates. As a result, the findings show that Chinese businesspersons always protected their own face after being refused by their superiors, peers or subordinates in intercultural communication.

Chinese businesspersons save self-face when they are refused because of their desire to keep face and afraid of losing face. Face, in the view of Chinese businesspersons, is significantly desirable in their daily life, because it can represent one's public image, reflecting one's dignity, respect, ability, and experience (Wang, 2013). In daily usage, *mianzi* represents the kind of social reputation that is highly valued by Chinese. It is the kind of status that has been deliberately accumulated by a person through effort and achievement and with pride during the course of life. In order to have this kind of face, one must rely on the social environment to obtain affirmation from other people (Hwang & Hwang, 2012). While, being refused is just on the opposite of affirmation and it can severely damage social reputation of Chinese businesspersons. Thus, with less social reputation or less face bearing, one's trust from others will weaken and take the edge off their business practices. Hence, Chinese businesspersons save their own face when they are refused by others in intercultural communication.

Besides, the mean scores also present no significant distinction in the degree of protecting self-face when Chinese businesspersons communicate with their superiors, peers, and subordinates. For example, the mean score of protecting face when they report their mistakes to their superior is 2.96; to their peer, the mean is 2.96; and to their subordinate, the mean is 2.96. It shows the same trend of protecting self-face when Chinese businesspersons are refused by their superior, peer and subordinate. Hence, there is barely a disparity of protecting face degree among the mean scores when they report mistakes to their superiors, peers, and subordinates. Therefore, the practices of protecting self-face remain unaffected by the relationship and social status.

The findings show that Chinese businesspersons protect their face when they report their mistakes and are refused in intercultural written communication. This finding is paralleled with interview findings, for example, a key informant in the interview mentioned that "I always protected my own face when I thought my face was going to be threatened or lost, such as when I made mistakes or when I was rejected". It is obvious that Chinese businesspersons treated reporting mistakes and being refused as situations triggering face loss or threaten to face and Chinese businesspersons were striving for avoiding lose face and maintain the same face. Just like a respondent claimed that "definitely I need to protect my own face. I made a great effort to having the current status or face. I cannot bear losing it. So I would try my best to avoid the loss of it"

In summary, Chinese businesspersons save their own face in situations that may cause face loss, namely, when they make mistakes or are refused, or they will apply some strategies to protect their face. This finding is aligned with Hernández-Flores (2004), who proposed that to reach social and communicative goals, people know that respecting, protecting, and valuing others' face is a requirement. Nevertheless, at the same time, people have personal bonds to their own face and intend to protect and value their own face too. This finding also supports Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005)'s face-negotiation theory which is built on Brown and Levinson (1987) face theory, distinguishing between protecting one's own face and the need to respect others. Hence, these studies verified that people would protect other's face and their own face.

In addition, this research supports Ting-Toomey (2005)'s theory, which proposed that "in almost all conflict situations, defending or face-saving strategies are needed when one's face is being threatened or attacked." She stated that when our face is under attack, emotional vulnerability or anxiety sets in and associated emotions. These emotions trigger the need to protect their own face. Furthermore, the finding is also consonant with Redmond (2015) research, which categorized a set of strategies people use to save face into two situations: to manage threats to other people's face and to manage threats to their own face. Hence, when face is threatened or hurt, people will apply some strategies to protect their own face.

Qualitative findings

Furthermore, apart from providing support to questionnaire findings, the interview was also applied to find strategies Chinese businesspersons used to save their own face. Interviewees shared their experiences and practices of protecting self-face in business practices. According to interview data, they all have the experience of protecting self-face when communicating with people from other countries for work in intercultural communication. Some of the responses collected related to saving face strategies are shown in following excerpts:

Respondent 1: When my face is getting harmed, I always deny replying to the other to protect my own face

Respondent 11: When my face is harmed, I will protect my own face by avoidance

Respondent 2: When I make mistakes, I will also protect my own face by finding some excuses.

Respondent 3: When I make mistakes, I will try to protect my own face by covering mistakes.

Respondent 4: I will try to protect my own face when I have a bad performance at work; I tell others about my bad performance, which let me lose face is because of my poor health condition, and I am more than that.

Respondent 6: When I make mistakes, I think my face may be lost, so I will try my best to apologize and compensate to prevent more face loss.

Respondent 7: When I am criticized and made something wrong, I will protect my own face by apologizing and trying to make up for my mistakes.

Respondent 9: I will protect my own face when I make mistakes; I would like to apologize for that and find some excuses for my mistakes.

Respondent 12: I will protect my own face when I do something wrong or have a bad performance. I will try to make some compensation for my mistakes.

Respondent 14: When I made a mistake, and it has been pointed out, I will first apologize to show my modesty, and I will also explain the situation to prevent me from losing more face.

Respondent 5: When my face is harmed, for example, when others refuse me, I always comfort myself, and on the other part, it's okay to protect my own face from losing more.

Respondent 8: I will protect my own face when others say something bad of me. I will say it's all the fault of the other part.

Respondent 10: I will protect my own face when I feel offended. For example, I will feel losing face when others criticize me or refuse me. I will find some excuses to protect my own face.

Respondent 13: When my face is harmed, I will protect my own face, especially when I am refused. I will pretend nothing is serious, and I can handle the problem by myself, or I can find another way.

Respondent 15: I will protect my own face when I am refused. I will pretend I did not care about the other's refusal, and I have the ability to deal with the problem by other methods.

These excerpts present short responses of Chinese businesspersons who protect self-face in business practices. These findings support the results of the questionnaire, which also showed that the Chinese businesspersons protected their self-face when their face was hurt or threatened. Many participants mentioned that they always did not reply to the other side to protect their own face when they felt losing face. In addition, when they made mistakes or had poor performance, they would like to find excuses. Some participants mentioned that they would find others' faults to cover up their mistakes or bad performance. They would not admit that a lack of ability caused their mistakes and poor performance; instead, they might make their health problem or mental obstacle as an excuse for their mistakes or poor performance to protect their own face and avoid losing more face.

Discussion

These results hint at the fact that face, in the view of Chinese businesspersons, is significantly desirable in their daily life, because it can represent one's public image, reflecting one's dignity, respect, ability, and experience (Li, 2020). Making mistakes means limited ability, which can harm one's face, while when the mistake is caused by uncontrolled external factors rather than one's ability, one's face can be saved to a great extent. Besides, when the mistakes are covered up, one can also hide one's limitations, which can avoid other's negative assessment, and thus, save one's own face. Hence, Chinese businesspersons always find excuses, especially external excuse to their mistakes or poor performance or cover up their mistakes to save their own face.

Besides, when they are refused and criticized, it suggests that their face has already been lost. In such a state, they will pretend that nothing wrong has happened or they can deal with the problem by another method. This is evident of having the ability to influence the views of others. Often, they may avoid losing more face after showing that they can deal with the problem after being refused with their responses. The responses to criticism would include an apology, compensation, and finding excuses. Criticism is deemed as a severe damage to one's face, because face is a socially formed self-image regarded by others pursuing approval and respect (Qi, 2011, 2017). While being criticized refers to disapproval and negative evaluation (Molodcha & Khilkovska, 2022), which is on the opposite of approval and respect. Hence, being criticized causes people lose face and they adopt some strategies as the remedy to save their face.

The strategy of apology cannot directly save one's face, but it shows the politeness of the addresser, which can earn respect. In addition, compensation is an important strategy to address the problem of losing face, because the compensation conducted can show one's ability, which is a factor towards protecting one's face. The compensation conducted can also earn respect from others so as to save the addresser's face. At last, excuses are used to show others that the criticism is not caused by the addresser, but by the limited competence of the addresser. Instead, problem caused by the uncontrollable factors can relieve the suspicion of addresser's being incompetent. Thus, one can save one's own face by shifting blame to external and uncontrollable reasons.

Therefore, Chinese businesspersons protect their own face by avoidance, and they always find excuses or justification for their performance when they make mistakes or have poor performance. In addition, they will also pretend that nothing serious has happened, and they are capable of dealing with the problem, even though they are refused by others to protect their face. This research is in line with Suwinyattichaiyorn and Generous (2019) who posited similar strategies people used to deal with face-threatening situation, including self-preserving responses to face-threatening acts and self-deprecating techniques. Self-preserving responses, which are commonly used by individualists, include making excuses or justifications. Self-deprecating responses, which are frequently used by collectivists, include acknowledging their lack of skill or effort.

In addition, Redmond (2015) presents four strategies to manage threats to their own face, including (a) accepting and correcting, (b) ignoring and denying, (c) diminishing, and (d) making an apology and/or compensation. Although Redmond (2015) did not mention the strategies of pretending and showing that they

can deal with the problem, strategies of apology, denying, and accepting are the same as those in the current research. In addition, the finding shows that when Chinese businesspersons are refused, they will pretend nothing to protect their own face. This finding supports Kim, Guan, and Park (2012) research who mentioned that one general category of strategies for saving one's own face in interaction includes avoidance of further communication or escape from the situation, and individuals can mitigate negative consequences by pretending nothing serious has happened and ignoring the undesirable situation. Hence, all these studies proved that apology, admitting, finding excuses and justification, and pretending nothing severe and that they can handle the problem are the strategies Chinese businesspersons frequently use to protect their own face.

Conclusion

This paper has argued saving the addresser-oriented face, which is a subject very often neglected in the domain of face-theory. The Chinese businesspersons value face especially when communicating others. A model of saving addresser-oriented face was proposed, including the situations and correlated strategies in intercultural business communication. The qualitative and quantitative research showed that apart from saving the addressee's face, it was more likely to save the addresser's face when their own face was threatened or hurt. The strategies applied include apologizing, admitting, finding excuses and justification, pretending nothing severe, and showing they can handle the problem.

This research has some limitations, which also provide some avenues for future research. First, this research focused merely on addresser's face in business field and situations and strategies of protecting addresser's face only fit for business interactions. However, whether the situations and strategies are fixed or not in different communication context is still uncertain. Hence, future research can focus on saving addresser-oriented face in different fields, such as saving addresser-oriented face in a classroom or the field of diplomacy. In addition, this research was conducted by keeping focusing on intercultural communication of Chinese businesspersons, which lead to uncertainty of the practice of saving addresser's face happening exclusively in China or being a universal rules of interaction. Therefore, the situations and strategies involved in saving addressers' face practice needs also studying in other countries to test whether this practice is specific in China or a universal principle.

This research contributes to the study of face from a different point of view---addresser-oriented face. This research has argued that there is a need to pay more attention to the addresser-oriented face in intercultural communication in China. In addition, this research provides a deeper insight into face of China's business communication. Situations and strategies for saving the addresser's face are valuable contributions to understanding face. Practically, the findings can also guide people from other countries to better understand Chinese businesspersons' communication processes and are conducive to smooth and effective intercultural communication.

References

- Agustina, S. (2021). Face-Saving and Face-Threatening Negotiation by Lecturers: Gender and Teaching Experience Differences. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 5(2), 590-599. doi: <https://doi.org/11030743/ll.v5i2.4527>
- Benoit, W. L. (1995). Sears' repair of its auto service image: Image restoration discourse in the corporate sector. *Communication Studies*, 46(1-2), 89-105. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979509368441>
- Blackman, C. (1997). *Negotiating China: Case studies and strategies*. Allen & Unwin.
- Blackman, C. (2000). *China business: The rules of the game*. Allen & Unwin.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, P. B., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1572543024170411648>
- Burns, J. P., & Bruner, M. S. (2000). Revisiting the theory of image restoration strategies. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(1), 27-39. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370009385577>
- Cardon, P. W. (2004). *A qualitative study of the role of face in Chinese business culture: Implications for American businesspersons*. Utah State University. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/2e43621c739a4480771211f3b54653b1>
- Cardon, P. W. (2009). A model of face practices in Chinese business culture: Implications for western businesspersons. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 51(1), 19-36. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.20242>
- Cardon, P. W., & Scott, J. C. (2003). Chinese business face: Communication behaviors and teaching approaches. *Business communication quarterly*, 66(4), 9-22. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/108056990306600402>
- Chen, R. (1993). Responding to compliments A contrastive study of politeness strategies between American English and Chinese speakers. *Journal of pragmatics*, 20(1), 49-75. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(93\)90106-Y](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(93)90106-Y)

- Chen, S., & Lunt, P. (2021). Social Interaction, Self-Presentation and Face in Chinese and West European Contexts. In *Chinese Social Media* (pp. 27-40). Emerald Publishing Limited. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83909-135-320211007>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 34(3), 252-257. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.04.001>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). A framework for design. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 2003, 9-11. Retrieved from <http://sandbox.informatics.iupui.edu/~kmacdorm/courses/ResearchDesign/Presentations/Creswell11Framework.pdf>
- Fang, T. (1999). *Chinese business negotiating style*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18(3), 213-231. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008>
- Goffman, E. (1967). On Face-Work. In I. Ritual (Ed.), *Interaction Ritual* (pp. 5-45). Pantheon, New York. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/GoffmanFace1967.pdf>
- Hernández-Flores, N. (2004). Politeness as face enhancement. In *Current trends in the pragmatics of Spanish* (pp. 265-284). Benjamins, Amsterdam. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.123.21her>
- Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: A sex-preferential politeness strategy. *Journal of pragmatics*, 12(4), 445-465. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(88\)90005-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(88)90005-7)
- Hou, M. (2022). The reschematization of face in Chinese overseas students' intercultural experience. *International Journal of Language and Culture*, 9(1), 27-47. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijolc.20020.hou>
- Hu, H. C. (1944). The Chinese concepts of "face". *American anthropologist*, 46(1), 45-64. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/662926>
- Hung, K., Qiu Zhang, H., Guillet, B. D., & Wang, L. (2020). China watching: Luxury consumption and its implications. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 37(5), 577-592. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2018.1525470>
- Hwang, K.-K., & Hwang, K.-K. (2012). Face and morality in Confucian society. *Foundations of Chinese psychology: Confucian social relations*, 265-295. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-1439-1_10
- Jia, W. (2001). *The remaking of the Chinese character and identity in the 21st century: The Chinese face practices*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Kádár, D. Z., & Mills, S. (2011). *Politeness in East Asia*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/id/eprint/3853>
- Kim, W., Guan, X., & Park, H. S. (2012). Face and facework: A cross-cultural comparison of managing politeness norms in US and Korea. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 19. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1284>
- Leech, G. N. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford University Press.
- Leung, T. K., & Chan, R. Y. k. (2003). Face, favour and positioning—a Chinese power game. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(11/12), 1575-1598. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310495366>
- Leung, T. K. P., Wong, Y. H., & Tam, C. T. W. (2003). Face work in Chinese culture: Its role in Chinese business. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260403542>
- Li, H. (2020). Towards an emic understanding of Mianzi giving in the Chinese context. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 16(2), 281-303. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0052>
- Lounis, M. (2014). Cross-cultural perspectives on linguistic politeness. *Cross-cultural communication*, 10(1), 56-60. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3968/J.CCC.1923670020141001.4324>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Molodcha, N., & Khilkovska, A. (2022). Strategies of criticism and disapproval in the academic administrative discourse. *Cognition, Communication, Discourse*(25), 29-38. doi: <https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2022-25-03>
- Naderi, N., & Hirst, G. (2017). Recognizing Reputation Defence Strategies in Critical Political Exchanges. In *Proceedings of Recent Advances in Natural Language Processing* (pp. 527-535). INCOMA Ltd. doi: https://doi.org/10.26615/978-954-452-049-6_069
- Nair, D. (2019). Saving face in diplomacy: A political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 672-697. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066118822117>
- Ningsih, R., Boeriswati, E., & Muliastuti, L. (2020). Language politeness of students and teachers: An ethnographic study. *Getsempena English Education Journal*, 7(1), 159-169. doi: <https://doi.org/10.46244/geej.v7i1.1063>
- Pan, Y. (2000a). Facework in Chinese service encounters. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 10(1), 25-61. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.10.1.03pan>
- Pan, Y. (2000b). *Politeness in Chinese face-to-face interaction*. Greenwood Publishing Group. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404502272188>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Purnomo, W. A. (2020). Politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction in EFL classes. *Language-Edu*, 9(1).
- Qi, X. (2011). Face: A Chinese concept in a global sociology. *Journal of Sociology*, 47(3), 279-295. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311407692>
- Qi, X. (2017). Reconstructing the concept of face in cultural sociology: in Goffman's footsteps, following the Chinese case. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 4(1), 1-17. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-017-0069-y>
- Redmond, M. (2015). Face and politeness theories. *English Technical Reports and White Papers*, 2. Retrieved from http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_reports/2
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (1994). Face parameters in East-West discourse. *The challenge of facework: Cross-cultural and interpersonal issues*, 133-157. Retrieved from <https://diva.sfsu.edu/bundles/184657>
- Sheldon, C. A., & Sallot, L. M. (2008). Image repair in politics: Testing effects of communication strategy and performance history in a faux pas. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(1), 25-50. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260802520496>
- Song, S. (2012). *Politeness and Culture in Second Language Acquisition*. Palgrave Macmillan London. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137030634>
- Stewart, M. (2008). Protecting speaker's face in impolite exchanges: The negotiation of face-wants in workplace interaction. *De Gruyter Mouton*, 4(1), 31-53. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/PR.2008.002>
- Suwinyattichaiporn, T., & Generous, M. A. (2019). Managing Face in the Midst of Interpersonal Deception: A Cross-Cultural Examination. *The Palgrave Handbook of Deceptive Communication*, 567-582. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96334-1_30
- Tao, X. (1994). *The Chinese who want face*. Beijing, People's Republic of China: International Cultural Press.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). A face negotiation theory. In *Theory and intercultural communication* (pp. 47-92). Retrieved from <http://www.ocw.upi.ac.id/files/Slide-CMM201-CMM201-Slide-14.pdf>
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory. *Theorizing about intercultural communication*, 4, 71-92. Retrieved from <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/the-matrix-of-face-an-updated-face-negotiation-theory/>
- Wang, M. (2013). *Guanxi, Renqing, and Mianzi in Chinese Social Relations and Exchange Rules—A Comparison between Chinese and Western Societies (A Case Study on China and Australia)*. (Doctoral dissertation). Master Thesis, Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg University. Retrieved from https://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/files/76990262/Master_degree_thesis_of_Culture_Communication_and_Globalization_from_Minglei_Wang.pdf
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615184>
- Yu, G., Liu, C., & Niu, J. (2019). Comparative study of young consumers luxury brand attachments in Metropolises of Korea and China. *management*, 11, 12. Retrieved from [http://ijemr.ascons.org/digital-library/manuscript/file/15775/IJEMR_3\(2\)-1-1.pdf](http://ijemr.ascons.org/digital-library/manuscript/file/15775/IJEMR_3(2)-1-1.pdf)
- Yule, G. (2005). *The study of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zhai, X. (1995). *The Chinese perspectives on face: A study of social psychology in the Chinese context*. Taipei, Taiwan: Guiguan Publishing Company.
- Zhai, X. (2010). *The logic of Chinese behavior*. Beijing, People's Public of China: Social Science Archives Publishing.
- Zhu, R. (1989). The pressure of "face" and correlated behavior. *Chinese Psychology and Behavior*, 177-212.
- Zuo, B. (1997). *Chinese moral face-Exploration of emic social psychology*. Wuhan, People's Republic of China: Huazhong Normal University Press.