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**THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF ASIAN FACE AND
THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL
BEHAVIOR AND INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT**

ABSTRACT

‘Face’ is a sociological concept that refers to a positive self-image that one presents or is assumed to present to others in public. Although face is considered a universal phenomenon, there are substantial cultural differences in how it is conceptualized and operationalized between collectivistic Asia and the individualistic West. Asian face is more complex and dynamic than Western face because of its multi-dimensional nature. Asians are also far more obsessed with face than Westerners are in general. I propose that the multiple dimensions of Asian face such as power/favor/relations, mask/image and moral/honor are responsible for Asian facism. I also examined how the multiple dimensions of Asian face would affect organizational behavior and international management.

Keywords: face, facework, Asian face, facism, international management

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INTRODUCTION

'Face' is a sociological concept that refers to a positive self-image that one presents or is assumed to present to others in public (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1955; Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998). Face shapes and regulates how individuals behave in their social interactions (Goffman, 1955). Face also affects important decisions made by public figures such as political leaders and business managers, as suggested by the title of a recent *New York Times* article, "Trump's Face-Saving Way Out of Crisis Raises Fears Over Rule of Law" (New York Times, 2019). Although it is a universal phenomenon (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1955; 1956; Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998), Kim and Nam (1998) argued that face might not only play different roles but also exercise a more powerful and pervasive influence on organizational behavior in Asia than in the West.

Face-related (and newly coined) terms such as "face economy" and "face consumption" have appeared in China as well as in Korea (Kinnison, 2017; Yoo, 2022), indicating how powerful and pervasive the influence of face can be on business and economic activities in Asia. The Chinese government has been so conscious of creating and promoting a favorable image of the country in the eyes of the world as to engage in official 'image projects.' 'APEC Blue' was one of such image projects that the Chinese government carried out to create smog-free skies above Beijing temporarily, just a couple of days before the APEC China 2014 summit (Kinnison, 2017). Zheng (2014, quoted in Kinnison, 2017: 41) commented on the term APEC Blue as follows:

"vividly depicts the façade that China wanted to present to the world while it hosted the 21 heads of the Asia-Pacific economies. It also brings to mind the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when the sky was clear blue and just a handful of cars ran down empty streets amid shuttered factories in Beijing and its neighboring provinces. Beijing once again showed itself willing to spend time, energy, money, and propaganda resources to impress the world with its ability to show its very best face."

China's obsession with creating a positive country's image or 'face' in the eyes of other countries continues. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics turned out to be one of the most expensive international sporting events to host. It costed China 8.8 billion US dollars at least, far surpassing the initial budget of 3.9 billion dollars (Financial Times, 2022). Some other sources estimated that the actual cost could go up to a whopping 38.5 billion dollars (Front Office Sports, 2022). A Western political scientist teaching in Hong Kong aptly commented, "For China's international image, prestige, and face, as the Chinese would say,

nothing is too expensive.” (New York Times, 2022). In other words, face is priceless in the Chinese mind.

Not just China. Another face-related yet tragic incident took place in Korea in the same year. A prominent entrepreneur, founder and CEO of one of the largest game companies in the world, committed suicide. The tragic and sudden ending of his life at the peak of his immensely successful business career sent shockwaves through the Korean society. A psychiatrist, who tried to make sense out of the suicide, pointed out that many Korean businesspeople who became exceptionally successful suffered from huge psychological burdens to maintain face by needing to constantly meet societal expectations. Social pressure often becomes too heavy for some individuals to bear when they fail to meet public expectations, and thus, lose face (Chosun Newspaper, 2022). In Japan, there was a newspaper article titled “Saving face or saving lives?” (Japan Times Weekly International Edition, 1995). According to the story, rescue work was delayed at the site of the Japan Airlines Flight 123 crash and many lives were lost. Why? Because the rescue workers tried to avoid embarrassing Japanese authorities. Surprisingly, Asians choose to save face over lives at times.

People in Asia, East Asia in particular, sharing Confucianism as common cultural roots, take face far more seriously than Westerners do. In the eyes of individualistic Westerners, Asians’ obsession with face may seem irrational. Asians often go the extra mile to save face at the expense of money even in the world of business. Figuratively speaking, losing face is like being naked in public, which can be immensely embarrassing and humiliating. Perhaps even worse: a Chinese proverb compares a person who has lost face to a tree without bark. Indeed, face can be a matter of life and death in the context of Asian culture (Kinnison, 2017).

Why do Asians take face so seriously? I will call the obsession with face among Asians ‘facism’ in this paper for the sake of discussion, although there is no such term in the English vocabulary yet. To understand the nature of Asian facism, I will take an emic approach, analyzing it from the Asian cultural perspective (i.e., collectivistic, hierarchical, and Confucian values), departing from the prevailing research perspective embedded in individualism in the West (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998). Building on Hu’s (1944) famous dichotomy of social face (*mianzi*) and moral face (*lian*), Kinnison (2017) employed an emic approach to identify three facets/dimensions of Asian face rooted in Confucianism. They are power/favor/relation (PFR), mask/image (MI), and moral/honor (MH). I

propose that these three dimensions and other related aspects are responsible for the emergence of facism in Asia.

There is a paucity of research on the relationship between Asian face and management practices and organizational behavior (Kim and Nam, 1998). Most of the research on face has been conducted in the areas of anthropology, sociology, diplomacy, political science, communication, and language pragmatics (e.g., Brown and Levinson, 1987; Carson, 2016; Goffman, 1955; 1956; 1959; 1967; 1969; Haugh, 2009; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998; Kinnison, 2017). I will attempt to fill this unfortunate gap in our understanding by examining how the multiple dimensions of Asian face would affect cross-cultural management practices and organizational behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Face, a concept originated in Asia, became part of the English vocabulary around the 19th century (Andrè, 2013). Goffman (1955, 1956) then universalized and popularized the concept as a legitimate research topic in the literature. Since Goffman, Haugh (2009) stated that face “has become seemingly indispensable in the discussion of various aspects of social interactions, particularly politeness (p.1).” Initially inspired by the Chinese concept of face, Goffman developed his theory to account for much of the subtlety in daily social interactions in the West. Goffman (1955) 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... an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing himself (p. 213).” Being embedded in Western individualism himself, Goffman viewed the concept of face and face-related behaviors as self-oriented, not group-oriented.

In the West, individuals use face to create positive impressions on others to serve their own self-interest, that is, impression management (Goffman, 1959). In this paper, I will assume that a social interaction takes place in a dyadic relationship between an actor and an observer just for the sake of discussion, although social interactions can take place between more than two individuals. The actor claims and presents face to make a good impression on the observer. Once the actor has presented face, he/she is expected to live up to it. If he/she fails to do so, the actor loses face. Losing face causes the actor to experience flustering, embarrassment, or shame. Saving face means that the actor can maintain the impression that he/she has claimed for. The actor may engage in either

preventive (avoiding face threats together) or restorative (recovery once face threats emerge) means to save face (Manning, 1992).

Embarrassment caused by lost face is a painful emotion that individuals want to avoid. Therefore, most individuals do not take face lightly. Embarrassment causes the actor to lose social poise, and thus, the interaction between the actor and the observer could be disrupted. The observer also has stakes in protecting the actor's face to keep the flow of social interaction. Goffman (1955) called the efforts both the actor and the observer made together to maintain or to save face "facework."

Both the actor and the observer engage in facework consciously as well as subconsciously, following a culturally prescribed pattern of behaviors. In this sense, facework is like a cultural ritual (Goffman, 1967). Both the actor and the observer have their roles to play and rules to follow. Two implicit rules prevail here: the rule of self-respect for the actor and the rule of consideration for the observer. The interplay of these two rules forms the basic structure for the ritual of facework. In most cases, facework is based on tacit cooperation between the actor and the observer. From shopping, dining etiquette, wedding rituals to business negotiations, society contains a variety of microstructures, called "interaction orders" and "games" that link a kind of encounter with a set of roles and rules (Goffman, 1967; 1969). Likewise, face affects organizational behaviors because organizations also contain a variety of interaction orders among their members.

Although Goffman (1959) discussed facework between the actor and the observer, his primary focus was on the actor rather than the observer. Goffman was interested in how the actor presented face to others differently depending on various situations. Using his famous dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman viewed social behavior as something like performing on stage. Like an actor engaging in stage performance in front of an audience, the actor in a social interaction would present face to the observer, and then, 'perform' accordingly to his/her face. The dramaturgical perspective assumes that the actor's behaviors are not static but change to suit the situation he/she is in (Crossman, 2019). Goffman suggested broadly two kinds of situations that would affect the actor's behavior or performance: "frontstage" and "backstage."

Frontstage is where the actor carefully displays role-consistent words and behavior (Carson, 2016). People engage in frontstage behavior when they know others are watching. Frontstage behavior reflects internalized norms and expectations for behavior shaped partly by the setting, the role one plays in it, and by one's physical appearance. Frontstage behavior is highly intentional and purposeful, or it can be habitual and subconscious (Cole, 2019).

Although the observer is expected to behave politely, even employing a lip service not to threaten the actor's face, there is a certain degree of 'performance anxiety' on the part of the actor because of a fear, whether real or perceived, that he/she may fail to meet the observer's expectation, and thus, to lose face. This is a fear of revealing the mismatch between the hidden real self and the image presented on surface through face (King, 1988; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). The bigger the mismatch, the bigger the fear. Therefore, the actor is under pressure to prove the validity of his/her face to the observer with his/her performance, which can be a constant source of stress for the actor.

Backstage often becomes a more subtle, and thus, interesting setting than frontstage for facework. Goffman (1959) defined backstage as "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course (pp 112-13)." This is where the actor can relax, freed from performance anxiety. The actor may also prepare for the next round of social performance. At times, the observer may choose to pretend to be blind to the actor's faux pas, gaffe, or blunder, and thus, to change the frontstage to a 'temporary backstage' to save face for the actor out of either thoughtful consideration or a strategic purpose. Such a sensitive act by the observer is often called tact, diplomacy, or politeness (Goffman, 1955).

Carson (2016), drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, argued that backstage could be used for some countries to avoid the negative consequences of losing face because of breaking their role in international relations. For example, some countries individually and collectively conceal evidence of foreign involvement when the danger of unintended conflict escalation is acute in international politics. During the Korea War, the Soviet Union secretly involved in the war to the knowledge of Western allies and the US. However, the US and Western allies decided to officially ignore it, hoping to avoid the risk of escalating the Korean War to a general war with the Soviet Union. Such a behavior would create a kind of backstage in which adversaries could exceed limits on war without stimulating hard-to-resist pressure to escalate further. Such tacit collusion arises when both sides seek to manage escalation risks even as they compete for power and refuse to surrender. Therefore, one can imagine that there may be a tacit agreement between Russia and Western allies in the current Ukraine-Russia War as long as both sides want to avoid the risk of escalating the conflict. If that is the case, they can do so by creating a kind of backstage not to cause their opponents to lose face in public.

Brown and Levinson (1987) expanded Goffman's (1955, 1967) work on facework to develop a theory of politeness. They argued that the actor's face was vulnerable because

the observer had the power to threaten it with various kinds of behaviors. Brown and Levinson called such behaviors “face-threatening acts (FTAs).” For example, the observer can discredit the actor’s face by disagreeing, criticizing, ignoring, and exhibiting other kinds of hostile responses. In most social interactions, the observer behaves so politely as not to threaten the actor’s face for the sake of establishing and maintaining a good relationship.

Brown and Levinson (1987) identified another face-related need in addition to Goffman’s (1959) concept of the need to present a positive self-image: the need for an image as a person of independence and autonomy. Although individuals, as social animals, like to have company, they also have a need to keep others at a distance to secure their own territory and psychological space. It is a need for autonomy, privacy, self-determination, and non-distraction as a person of independence. Unlike Goffman’s (1955) proactive self-presentational need, the need for personal space is passive, being assumed as a basic right that an independent grown-up is entitled to. Brown and Levinson called the former “positive face” and the latter “negative face.” If the observer interfered with the actor, the actor’s negative face would be threatened. Therefore, the observer is expected to behave so politely as to show respect for both positive face and negative face of the actor in a normal social encounter.

Some researchers criticized both Goffman’s and Brown & Levinson’s models, claiming that they were Western-biased, embedded in the value system of individualism (Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, and Ogino, 1986; Ide, 1989, 2006; Matsumoto, 1988, 2003). Matsumoto (1988) argued that there was no such thing as negative face in Japanese culture, challenging the universality of Brown and Levinson’s model. Collectivistic Asians may also value autonomy and privacy, but they may not be as important as group-oriented values such as interpersonal harmony and cooperation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). However, Kiyama, Tamaoka, and Takiura (2012) found evidence suggesting that Brown & Levinson’s theory was applicable to Japan. Therefore, research findings so far are inconclusive.

Ting-Toomey (1988) and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) examined the influence of culture on face and offered face-negotiation theory to explain how individuals would behave differently in conflict where face could be easily threatened. Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) argued that there were three kinds of face at work in conflict: self-face, other-face, and mutual-face (the face of relationship). According to their theory, individualists (e.g., Westerners) tend to use confrontational approach because they are more concerned about self-face than other-face or mutual-face. On the other hand, collectivists (e.g., Asians) tend to avoid confrontational approach and employ more harmonious approaches such as

accommodation, avoidance, or compromise because they are concerned about other-face and mutual-face as equally as or more than self-face. As a result, the difference in conflict management style is attributable to the cultural differences in facework. In other words, face may be conceptualized and operationalized differently in Asia than in the West.

Andr  (2013) pointed out that Goffman's face was largely divorced from its historical Asian roots. Therefore, researchers should draw from various emic understandings to have a better understanding of the complexity of Asian face as suggested by Haugh (2013).

CONFUCIAN ROOTS OF AISAN FACE

Cheng (1986) argued that Confucianism was the unequivocal ideological background and foundation of the concept of face. Both Hwang (2011) and Kinnison (2017), echoing Cheng's argument, traced the cultural origin of Asian face back to the Confucian ideology. Because Asian face is primarily a cultural product of Confucianism, we need to understand the main features of Confucianism to unlock the distinctive characteristics of Asian face.

Confucianism was born about 1500 years ago in China. It spread to Korea and Japan, forming a common cultural foundation amongst the three East Asian countries. As an influential philosophy and collection of teachings, Confucianism has affected and shaped the worldview, values, norms, customs, and social behaviors of East Asians throughout history (Cheng, 1986; Lee, 2018; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). The Confucianism worldview assumes that a society is a network of complex interpersonal relationships that are fundamentally hierarchical. It emphasizes maintaining and promoting an orderly and harmonious state in the various forms of hierarchical relationships as one of the most important values (Kinnison, 2017).

In contrast with individualistic Western cultures, Confucianism does not assume that individuals are isolated creatures who are socialized to make rational decisions based on self-interest (Hwang, 1987). Everybody is embedded in the network of complex relationships, whose job is to find his/her place relative to others in the network and behave according to the norms, roles, and rules assigned to his/her place and status, as well as the expectations of others. What defines personhood is not the unique individual traits that one is born with, but his/her relationships with others and the ability to fit in his/her groups, and thus, to be accepted by others as a legitimate occupant of his/her place in the hierarchical social network. In other words, an isolated person who has no place in the social network is not considered a person.

Confucianism has a heavy emphasis on morality. Each man is encouraged to strive to become a 'superior gentleman' (*jūnzǐ* in Chinese and *goonja* in Korean) who demonstrates a noble character and respectable reputation. One can become a Confucian gentleman through continuous self-cultivation (Cheng, 1986; Gu, 1990; Lai, 1995; Zhai, 1994) by following a set of norms and rules that are appropriate to one's natural moral development (Chang and Holt, 1994). Face symbolizes the image ascribed to such a 'superior gentleman,' who deserves to be treated with respect from others. At the same time, face works as a sanction, both social and internal, that regulates how one is supposed to behave as a respectable member of society. Cua (1983) argued that the set of norms and manners related to face were concerned with the maintenance of social structure as a harmonious pattern of roles and statuses, functioning as an important instrument of social and political control.

Another important aspect of Confucianism is to differentiate very clearly between insiders and outsiders. A similar concept of in-group vs. out-group distinction also exists in the West (Tajfel, 1974). However, the gap between insiders and outsiders as well as how one behaves differently toward each group is more strongly pronounced in Asia than in the West (Bond and Leung, 1983; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Insiders are in-group members who share feelings of affection, warmth, safety, and attachment (Hwang, 1987). These individuals are significant others to the self and the separation between the self and them is difficult. Markus and Kitayama (1991) called such a construal of self "interdependent self," differentiating it from the typical "independent self" in the West who has a clear boundary of the self even from his/her intimate in-group members such as family. Asians share pride, shame, glory, and sadness together between insiders (Bond, 1991). The relationship between the self and insiders is characterized by the expressive tie that is a relatively permanent and stable social relationship (Hwang, 1987).

Outsiders can be further divided into close and distant outsiders. Those who belong to close outsiders have instrumental relationships with the self. For insiders, building a tie with them is the goal itself. For outsiders, the relationship serves only as an instrument to attain other goals. As a result, the relationship with outsiders is unstable and temporary. This relationship "exists, for example, between salesmen and customers, bus drivers and passengers, nurses and outpatients in a hospital" (Hwang, 1987: 950). The distant outsiders are strangers who may have little or no relationship with the self.

Founded on the basis that every individual who occupies a social position should have a respectable and admirable reputation, Cheng (1986: 343) claims, "face becomes a justifying and sanctioning principle of social conduct" and "determines human value and

human position” in a Confucian society. A person with face is a Confucian gentleman with a noble character, and thus, will be entrusted to hold a social position. Therefore, gentleman in Confucianism is a term loaded with moral virtue, which “has evaluative force such that one who does not act according to the requirements implied by the face should not be addressed as such” (Lai, 1995).

Losing one's reputation equates with loss of face, which not only casts doubt on the person's character and brings shame to him/herself, but also brings shame to his/her significant others because of the interdependent nature of the individuals within the insiders. Thus, the concern for reputation is essential for the development of Asian face (Cheng, 1986). Consideration for one's face is contextual and situational with several influencing factors such as the presence of witnesses, relationship with the witnesses, locality, social status, seniority, and roles in relationship (Yang, 1945).

THE CONCEPT OF FACE AND THE DYNAMICS OF FACEWORK IN ASIA

The concept of Asian face had emerged as a fascinating and intriguing topic to Westerners and Asians before it became a research topic for academia (Kinnison, 2017). Smith (1894), one of the early Westerners who translated the Chinese concept into the English word ‘face,’ argued that the word ‘face’ was a compound noun of multitudes, with more meanings than Westerners should be able to describe or to comprehend. However, most of the early Westerners who wrote about Chinese face had a simplistic and negative view of it, associating it with ‘ridiculous’ politeness, ‘excessive’ politeness, and a tendency for lying and deceit (Andrè, 2013). They referred it simply as ‘false social appearance’ (Kinnison, 2017), ignoring much of the complexity in the expressions and concepts used by the local Chinese people in their daily lives.

Interestingly, the difficulty of comprehending the meaning of face as well as its negative connotation was also echoed by some Chinese intellectuals, who were largely influenced by the forces of the May Fourth Movement between 1919 and 1937. For example, novelist Lu Xun ([1934]1991:130) pinpointed face as the most complex and potent key to understanding Chinese national character and national spirit, with a question “What is this called face?” In his book “*The true story of Ah Q*” Lu (1960) ridiculed the Chinese people’s obsession with face as something no more than false social appearance. Another Chinese writer Lin Yutang (1936: 190-191), also said:

Face cannot be translated or defined. It is like honor and is not honor. It cannot be purchased with money, gives a man and a woman a material pride. It is hollow and is what men fight for and what many women die for... It protracts lawsuits, breaks up family fortunes, causes murders and suicides, and yet it often makes a man out of renegade who has been insulted by his fellow-townsman, and it is prized above all earthly possessions. It is more powerful than fate and favor, and more respected than the constitution. It often decides a military victory or defeat, and can demolish a whole government ministry. It is that hollow thing which men in China live by.”

Hu (1944), a Chinese American anthropologist, analyzed this puzzling and negatively perceived concept of “that hollow thing which men in China live by” scholarly. She was the first researcher to make a logical and compelling connection between the English word ‘face’ and the Chinese words and expressions that gave rise to the figurative use of the word in English (Hinze, 2012). Her seminal work has inspired much of the academic discourse on face that has developed over the next seven decades. In her analysis, Hu argued that there were two kinds of face in China: *mianzi* and *lian*. Hu defined *mianzi* as “a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation” (p. 45), referring to the extra prestige or status that is held by individuals by virtue of their exceptional actions, networks, positions, accomplishments, etc. *Mianzi* corresponds to social/positional face, which is in general a function of one’s social status (Ho, 1976). A similar concept to *mianzi* in Korea is called *chaemyoun* (Kim and Yang, 2011; Yang, 2002) whose literal translation is body and face.

Lian, on the other hand, represents “the confidence of society in the integrity of ego’s moral character,” and is “both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internal sanction” (Hu, 1944: 45). In other words, *lian* is moral face (Bond and Lee, 1981). Therefore, when one loses *lian*, it is impossible for him/her to function properly in society (Hu, 1944). A similar concept in Korea is called *yeomchi* whose translation would be the ability to know one’s own shame.

According to Hu, *lian* and *mianzi* are multifaceted concepts that can be lost, gained, given, taken, boosted, ruined, shared, considered, thick and thin, among other expressions. Her careful investigation into *mianzi* and *lian* revealed the complexity of these concepts and established that Chinese words such as *mianzi* and *lian* cannot be reduced simply to the meaning of ‘false social appearance’ (Hinze, 2012). Hu’s dichotomy continues to be the source of much consideration among contemporary researchers (Hinze, 2005; Gao, 2006).

Yang (1945) conducted a field study to examine how face affected people's behaviors in daily social lives in a Chinese village. Having defined face as "a social esteem accorded by others" (p. 167), Yang argued that face was an inclusive, broader, and more complex concept than similar concepts widely used in the West such as prestige, honor, or reputation. He also found that loss of face could trigger bitter conflicts between the individuals involved in face incidents. Goffman's groundbreaking research drew on the works of Hu (1944) and Yang (1945) for inspiration for his theories (Hinze, 2012).

Ho (1976) argued that face was the product of the person's social network rather than personal traits. In other words, face symbolizes the value of one's place in his/her social network. Ho also examined conditions and factors involved in losing face. First, the actor fails to meet others' expectations associated with his/her social status. Second, the actor is not treated by the observer as respectfully as his/her face deserves. Third, the in-group members (e.g., family members, relatives, immediate subordinates) of the actor fail to meet their social roles. Losing face, according to Ho, largely depends on others rather than the actor him/herself, which suggests that Asians may feel far more vulnerable regarding their face than their Western counterparts. In general, Ho's discussion mostly centered around *mianzi* rather than *lian*.

THREE DIMENSIONS/FACETS OF ASIAN FACE

Although Asian face is complex and multifaceted (Ting-Toomey and Cocroft, 1994), many scholars have followed Hu's (1944) dichotomy of *lian* and *mianzi* (Chang and Holt, 1994; Cheng, 1986; Gao, 2009; Ho, 1976; Hwang, 1987; Jia, 2001; Mao, 1994). Hu's dichotomy, although useful, falls short of adequately capturing the complexity of Asian face. Neither *mianzi* nor *lian* is sufficient to differentiate the conceptual variances, because these two are often interchangeable, and both can be used to refer to the same aspect of face (Kinnison, 2017). Kinnison (2017), therefore, suggested that research on face should go beyond the semantic differences such as *mianzi* and *lian* because the line between the two concepts often became blurry and they were used interchangeably in the daily lives of the Chinese.

Drawing from various emic understandings, Kinnison (2017) argued that Asian face had three distinctive functions and effects depending on the norms, rules, and relationships with others. He offered a trichotomy of Asian face: (1) power/favor/relations (PFR) face - one's social power and connection, (2) moral/honor (MH) face - one's dignity and integrity, and (3) mask/image (MI) face - one's façade to impress others. Each dimension has its own unique features denoting different social values and attributes a

person seeks. The means for attaining each aspect and the criteria of judgment may vary considerably. Both dimensions of power/favor/relations and mask/image are related to *mianzi*, while the dimension of moral/honor to *lian*.

Power/favor/relations (PFR) face – social power and connection

The PFR face indicates one's social status and position. It grants an individual power to influence others within his/her social and personal network (Cheng, 1986; Ho, 1976; Hwang, 1987; Zhai, 1994). Thus, individuals with PFR face can grant favor to others. "The higher the office a person occupies," Cheng (1986: 333) states, "the larger and stronger his face is for affecting action or for achieving a goal that he can be expected to possess." PFR face is measured in terms of size to gauge a person's allowance of personal influence on others and appeal to personal authority, respectability, and prestige (Cheng, 1986). Cheng argued that larger PFR face claims larger influence, larger social grace and respectability and carries specifically more powerful impetus and authority to achieve a goal. Smaller PFR face means less power, smaller influence, and less respectability.

Although the amount of face a person has is, in general, a function of his social status (Ho, 1976), different relationships entail different face for the same person (Cheng, 1986; Hwang, 1987). That is because PFR face is not fixed in amount but varies largely according to the social situation in which the actor is interacting (Ho, 1976). Cheng (1986) argued that a person's PFR face was a function of specific relationships between the interactants. For example, a mafia boss has PFR face among his/her clan members, but he/she has no power in the academic world. Similarly, a famous scholar has PFR in academia, but has no influence in the world of organized crime.

An Asian employee often complies with a request from his/her boss, even when it goes beyond the job description. For example, the Asian employee may work overtime without being paid or accompanying his boss to social events or doing personal chores for his boss simply out of a consideration for the face of the boss (Ho, 1976). There is a common expression in China as well as in Korea such as "considering his/her (third-party) face." It means that an individual does non-work related chores beyond the realm of legitimacy (Ho, 1976) for others out of consideration of the third party's PFR face.

Having PFR face is not only associated with the person's social power but also personal connections in social networks (Hwang, 1987). Close personal ties allow insiders or acquaintances of a person with PFR face to claim the same power and to obtain favor for themselves as if they had the same power as the power holder him/herself. A person

who has PFR face can exercise considerable influence over others in both direct and indirect ways (Ho, 1976). At the same time, he/she is under strong constraints to act in a manner consistent with the requirements for maintaining his/her PFR face as well as for reciprocating a due regard for the face of others. Thus, the concern for PFR face exerts a mutually restrictive, even coercive, power upon each member of the social network. Often the individual's action, regardless his/her own wishes, is dictated by the need to meet the expectations of others because of the norm of reciprocity (Ho, 1976).

In Asia's hierarchical network society, knowing how to increase PFR face has become a primary objective and a frequent power game (Hwang, 1987). Having PFR face "is both the goal and the means for strengthening and expressing the harmonization of human relationships among men in society" and "plays a role of preserving, promoting, or degrading social relationship and mutual respectability" (Cheng, 1986: 334) among insiders or acquaintances. As there is a plethora of relationship politics in Asian culture (Bond, 1991), building up PFR face becomes the social mechanism of the Asian power game (Hwang, 1987). PFR face can explain much of the subtlety and complexity of intra- as well as inter-organizational power games and politics in Asia.

Mask/image (MI) face – one's façade

MI face is another dimension of *mianzi*, which is probably more salient than PFR face in Asians' daily social lives. This face is related to one's success that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever maneuvering (Hu, 1944). It is one's self-image in public associated with non-moral attributes, such as material possessions, physical appearance, intellectual ability, good education, and so on, which may reflect one's intelligence, capability, talent, and other positive attributes admired by a social group or individual. In other words, MI face is about appearance, similar to Goffman's (1955) positive face. The desire for MI face motivates counterfeit consumption among Asians (Shan, Jiang, and Cui, 2021). A nice image in public can make people feel good and boost their self-esteem, win admiration from others, and satisfy their void glorious feeling and vanity (Kipnis, 1995; Zhai, 1994; Zuo, 1997), so it is "a hollow thing" (Lin, 1936: 191).

It is natural for people to wish to present a positive image in public, but there is a possibility of mismatch between what one wishes to look on the outside and what he/she really is on the inside (King, 1988). In other words, there is always a difference between an attribute claimed by an individual and an attribute perceived as being ascribed by others (Spencer-Oatey, 2007). This mismatch may cause a person to lose his/her MI face and feel

embarrassed, particularly for those who desire to present a good image to impress others. Such an actor may experience a certain degree of ‘performance anxiety’ when he/she behaves or performs according to his/her MI face in front of the observer.

Many individuals strive to obtain a positive self-image to hide their distressing situations, such as losing social status and prestige, being in poverty, or being laid off. They are so desperate as to maintain a fake image even to the point of suffering (Yang, 2001). For example, one became bankrupt after losing everything in the stock market. To hide his miserable condition, he walked miles to get to his destination, feeling too embarrassed to borrow money to buy a bus ticket. However, he told his friends that he did not want to take a bus because he loved sightseeing on foot (Kinnison, 2017). To impress others and present an image of being wealthy, many East Asians (e.g., Chinese and Koreans) would rather get themselves deep into debt by throwing lavish wedding banquets, or costly funeral ceremonies (Chosun Newspaper, 2015; Hu, 1944; Jia, 2001; Kipnis, 1995; Yang, 1994; Zhai, 1994; Zuo, 1997).

In contrast to PFR face, which is gauged by size, MI face is measured by density such as “thin” or “thick” to indicate a person's psychological sensitivity to endure embarrassment when a desired image and reality are mismatched (Kinnison, 2017). Thin-skinned face refers to an individual who is very concerned about his/her image, and thus, easily embarrassed; while those, who are so indifferent to other's impressions of themselves as to make excessive requests for favors or act blatantly selfishly in public (Kipnis, 1995), are deemed as having thick-skinned face. MI face is probably the most salient aspect of the Asian face concept. It is not difficult to see the connection between Asian MI face and Goffman's dramaturgical approach to face (Chang and Holt, 1994). This MI face easily becomes a disguise of truth at the expense of public good (Cheng, 1986) and turns a society into a huge theatrical stage (Zhang, 2012).

Although one's competence (e.g., intelligence, material success) image is part of MI face (Lim and Bowers, 1991), it has a negative connotation in Asia. Those who are competent and successful in life do not need to present an image to impress others because they already have it. That is why some well-known Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun (1934), Lin Yutang (1936), Du Chongyuan (1934), and Lao She (1941) mocked this propensity for image and considered MI face “a negative characteristic that must be eliminated from China in order for it to become part of the modern world” (André, 2013: 71). Such a negative attitude toward MI face remains strongly in Asia.

Moral/honor (MH) face – dignity and integrity

Often indicated by *lian* in Chinese, MH face represents an individual's moral integrity and dignity with a respectable reputation, working as a social sanction for enforcing moral standards (Hu, 1944). Unlike PFR face, every person can claim MH face regardless of his/her social status, wealth, education, or association as long as his/her moral character is untarnished (Cheng, 1986; Gao, 2009; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Jia, 2001; Zhai, 1994). Every decent and civilized human being should have MH face as a legitimate member of society.

As discussed above, MH face is founded on Confucian moral doctrines and ethical codes. Any infringement of the moral codes, such as stealing, cheating, committing crime, and others, is traditionally considered loss of one's MH face, and thus, one's dignity and integrity as a human being "is below one's dignity" (Cheng, 1986: 335). Identified with the sense of honor, integrity, and shame of a person, MH face represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character (Hu, 1944). An individual who has lost moral integrity will find it difficult to live a normal life as others do (Cheng, 1986; Hu, 1944). In a Confucian society it is almost impossible for a person with damaged MH face to function properly within the community because he/she is not considered as a decent human being, and thus, not a legitimate member of the society or the in-group (Hu, 1944). That is why losing MH face in Asia is equivalent to losing one's personhood as a dignified human being (Jia, 2001). It truly is a scary thing to lose MH face in Asian culture.

One unique characteristic of MH face in Confucian culture is its interdependent nature. Ho argued (1976) that although a person alone was held accountable for his/her conduct, his/her face could be lost or gained as a result of the behavior of his/her in-group member. Serious breaches of any social and moral code "will cast a shadow not only on his own character and the reputation of his family but will raise doubts as to the judgment and integrity of all those who educated and promoted him in life" (Hu, 1944: 51). Given the high degree of mutual dependence in Asian interpersonal relationships, the individual's face and the good name of his/her family are virtually inseparable in traditional Confucian society (Ho, 1976). One's MH face, therefore, belongs not only to oneself, but also more importantly to one's significant others, such as one's family, community, or organization (Jia, 2001). Hu (1944) points out that the fear of losing *lian* of one's in-group members not only implants in the mind of the young person the power of *lian*, but also gives him/her the consciousness of collective responsibility, which his/her family bears concerning his/her behavior.

Maintaining MH face is, therefore, not only an individual's business but also a collective concern (Hinze, 2005; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Jia, 2001; Yang, 1945). Fear of losing MH face in Asian culture, Hu (1944) claims, “keeps up the consciousness of moral boundaries, maintains moral values, and expresses the force of social sanction” (p. 50) and “has come to constitute a real dread affecting the nervous system of ego more strongly than physical fear” (p. 45). “The consciousness that an amorphous public is so-to-say supervising the conduct of ego,” Hu (1944: 48) states, “relentlessly condemning every breach of morals and punishing with ridicule, has bred extreme sensitivity in some people.” From ancient times to the present, many Asians chose to end their lives rather than endure the unbearable humiliation and shame brought upon them and their loved ones by this loss of honor and dignity.

The combination of all three dimensions of face contributes to Asian facism. The fear of losing face runs deep in the Asian mind because it may lead to rejection by others. Losing face could result in losing social legitimacy, power, morality, and even personhood, going beyond experiencing temporary embarrassment as in the West. In addition, the interdependent nature of face means that one feels obligated not to lose face to protect the reputation of his/her family, profession, company or country. In sum, Asian facism has emerged because of fear of losing his/her place in the network as well as the collective sense of responsibility, not because Asians love face. As self is considered sacred in the West (Dyer, 1995), face is considered sacred in Asia, but in a different way.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The concept of face, originated in Asia, is also familiar to Westerners. Such English terms as ‘saving face’ and ‘losing face’ have been used to describe how individuals behave in social and business context in the West. Although I have emphasized the cultural distinctiveness of Asian face in this paper, it is important to note that face is also a culture universal (Goffman, 1955; Brown and Levinson, 1987) that can bridge managers between Asia and the West. In international management, it is usually more effective for managers to apply universal than local cultures. Not only Westerners but also Asians should be aware of both universal and local aspects of face to work across cultures effectively. In this section, I will discuss the practical implications of the multidimensionality of Asian face for international management.

Managers should understand how as well as why Asian face differs from Western (or universal) face that Goffman (1955, 1956, 1959, 1967, 1969) and Brown and Levinson

(1987) elaborated on. Although their theories of face and facework are still widely used in the literature, Both Goffman and Brown and Levinson fall short of capturing the complexity of multidimensional Asian face (Kinnison, 2017). The three (PFR, MH, MI) dimensions of Asian face differ both qualitatively and quantitatively from the two dimensions (positive and negative) of Western face, although MI face may somewhat overlap with positive face. MH face is rare in the West, and so is negative face in Asia. In addition, MI face and MH face could be contradictory with each other (Shan et al., 2021), possibly creating cognitive dissonance. Faking one's true self (MI) is hardly considered to be moral or honorable (MH) even in Asian culture. However, Asians seem less troubled by such cognitive dissonance between MI and MH than their Western counterparts.

Although Western face may be less complicated and more straightforward than Asian face, there are important differences between the two that Asian managers should be aware of. The importance of negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987) in the West could be of special interest to Asian managers. Some scholars even argued that there might be no negative face in Asia (Matsumoto, 1988). Therefore, negative face could be a cultural blind spot for Asians. Asian managers who inadvertently threaten negative face of their Western counterparts could be perceived as rude, and thus, unpleasant to work with.

Another important cultural difference lies in the orientation of facework. Asian face is group-oriented, whereas Western face individual-oriented. Asians engage in facework to 'fit in' or belong to their group. On the other hand, Westerners engage in facework to 'stand out' among others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Losing face in the West usually means failing to stand out, and thus, passing embarrassment for the actor. Losing face in Asia, however, can be more detrimental because the actor can be rejected by others. The fear of rejection, real or perceived, causes Asians to take face far more seriously than their Western counterparts. Therefore, Western managers should be sensitive to the powerful emotions associated with Asian face.

Western managers also should be aware that saving other-face can be more important than saving self-face in Asia (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998). It is because of the collectivistic and interdependent nature of Asian face. If one tries to save self-face at the expense of other-face, he/she can be perceived as selfish, immature, and rude, and thus, not exactly a person of morality and honor. In other words, such a person is considered to be without MH face. Although Western managers tend to employ confrontational approaches in conflict because they have less regard to other-face than self-

face (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998), doing so against their Asian counterparts could backfire or not be as effective as in the West.

In their typical concern for other-face, Asians are particularly sensitive to saving the face of their boss. Most Asian subordinates are very unwilling to point out and correct their superior's mistake because such a behavior could be perceived as a threat to the superior's face, which is considered a cultural taboo. Malcom Gladwell (2008) in his book "Outliers" discussed the tragic Korean plane crash that killed more than 200 individuals caused by the pilot's mistake. Although the copilot was aware of the pilot's mistake during the landing, he refrained himself from correcting it. Gladwell suspected that the copilot was too afraid to cause the pilot to lose face by pointing out his superior's mistake directly. In Asia, when a subordinate wants to point out a mistake made by his/her superior, it is advisable for the subordinate to create a 'backstage' (e.g., an informal setting) where the threat to the superior's face is removed.

Although Brown and Levinson (1987) identified face threatening acts (FTAs) as culturally universal phenomena, Asian FTAs may differ from Western FTAs. For example, Yang (1944) identified age (seniority) as one of the key factors causing face to be lost in a Chinese village. Nam and Han (2005) also found that the North American top management of a Canadian-Korean merger operating in Korea, inadvertently threatened the face of their Korean employees by promoting younger but capable employees as their team leaders. Feeling humiliated, most of the senior employees declined to cooperate with their younger leaders, which led to declining organizational performance.

This is a common dilemma that Western managers may run into when they try to adopt Western management practices in Asia. Although there may not be an easy solution to this dilemma, Western managers could minimize the negative effects of face loss by arranging post hoc face-restorative measures. One idea might be to encourage the younger leaders to treat their older employees with extra but genuine respect as their seniors off work, which might compensate for their face loss at work. On the other hand, Asian managers should be aware that promoting based on seniority may save the seniors' face but can be perceived as unfair and inequitable in the West.

Lastly, MI face in Asia could be similar to positive face in the West because both try to present a positive image for the actor. However, Asians often hide their true self behind MI face, which could be perceived as a sign of dishonesty in the eyes of their Western counterparts. For example, an American MNC had considered making a huge investment in Asia and the company narrowed down to two countries as their final candidates: South

Korea and Malaysia, with South Korea being favored over Malaysia.¹ However, during of series of negotiations, the American negotiator began to suspect that his Korean counterpart was dishonest because he pretended to understand what he apparently did not. The Korean negotiator simply attempted to save face (i.e., English proficiency MI face) before the American negotiator. The American negotiator, who did not understand the concept of MI face, concluded that his Korean counterpart was dishonest, and thus, untrustworthy. Unfortunately, the negotiation ended in failure.

In the West, one is expected to ask for clarification if s/he does not understand what the other has said. In Asia, however, acknowledging ignorance to ask for clarification may cause the person to lose face. To avoid embarrassment, Asians often pretend to understand, hiding their ignorance behind MI face. It is important for Western managers to understand that Asians' face behaviors do not necessarily reflect their personal traits and characters. Asian facework is more situational than personal, which reflects the actor's understanding of the context, especially the relationship between the actor and the observer at the time. It would be advisable for Westerners not to mix between MI face and authentic self in Asia. On the other hand, Asian managers should be aware that MI face can be perceived negatively by Western counterparts as dishonest and untrustworthy.

When Mother Teresa came to India, she found that many homeless people were dying alone on the street. She figured that helping those homeless people dying with basic human dignity was the priority to helping the poor and the sick. Therefore, her first project was to build a hospice center, "Home for the Dying the Destitute" (Chawla, 1992). Those who were dying on the street alone were brought there to die while being cared for by others. One homeless dying at the center commented that he had lived like an animal, but now was dying like a human being. Perhaps the need to be treated with dignity and respect by others is more powerful than any other biological and psychological needs for human beings.

Face symbolizes human dignity, one of the most basic and fundamental needs and rights of being a member of society. It is true that face is often considered "a hollow thing" that is associated with superficiality and dishonesty. However, I believe that face is rooted in the fundamental need for human dignity, being treated with decency and respect by others. As long as such need for dignity is universal and central to human existence, face will continue to be a powerful force that governs how we should behave in our social and

¹ *My personal interview with a Times Magazine journalist in Korea.*

business interactions. Although the cultural differences in face could divide Asia and the West, the spirit of face, treating others with dignity and respect, can work as the unifying force between the West and Asia in the context of international management.

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