CHINESE CONCEPT OF "FACE"

by

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Chinese "Face"

Probably one of the most universal concepts the rest of the world has about the Chinese is their seeming obsession with "saving face". Visitors to China, those who write about China or the Chinese, and arm-chair philosophers apparently cannot avoid at least touching on this one aspect of Chinese character.

There is nothing wrong with mentioning the various facets of a nation's characteristics; indeed, one must be sure to present as complete a picture as possible if he is to be fair. The unfortunate thing is that, for some reason, face-saving, as the West considers it to be practiced by the Chinese, often arouses veiled, if not outright, ridicule or scorn by some Westerners. Why this should be so is hard to determine, especially since, if we are to be honest, it must be recognized that every society practices "Face"[1] whether that word is actually used or not.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary[2] gives a long list of definitions of "face", of which numbers 5, 6 and 7 are of special interest. Here we find that "face" means 5. "confidence; also boldness; as, have the *face* to ask. 6. Outward appearance; hence, disguise; pretense. 7. Dignity; prestige; as, to save (one's) face."

So often in the West we hear people talk of this or that person's "prestige"—gaining or losing it by some act—or another's "dignity" suffering or being evident because of his actions. Such expressions are common and one thinks nothing of them. It is "our way."

Even so, in China, a man or woman, boy or girl, leader or follower works to keep his place in society, and if he talks about it—which he seldom does in so many words—he talks of "saving face" or "losing"[3] it as matter-of-factly as the Westerner speaks of "maintaining dignity" or "gaining prestige". The result is the same; the vocabulary differs slightly.

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1 Hu Hsien-chin "Chinese Concept of Face", from Haring, Douglas G. *Personal Character and Cultural Milieu* (Syracuse, University Press, 1949) Sec. Ed. p. 409

2 Webster—*New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1956) Sec. Ed., p. 295

3 Hu, *Ibid.*, p. 409

In the following pages, the writer will present briefly what two Chinese writers—the well-known Lin Yu-tang, and Miss Hu Hsien-chin—have had to say about the Chinese feeling about "face" and then attempt to illustrate from personal experience among the Chinese some of the points made by these two authors. Some of the latter may seem trivial to the Westerner; but if he understands the Chinese mind about this, perhaps he will come to see that both groups of people have the same goal. They simply use different means to obtain it; and our Oriental friends may be seen to be rather more sensitive about this goal.

"Face" as Discussed by Lin Yu-tang

According to Lin Yu-tang, Face is one of the three F's that have always ruled China, the other two being Fate and Favor,[4] and it is from the close family system still so dominant in China today that the importance of face has arisen[5]. In the few pages where Mr. Lin discusses this side of Chinese character, he makes the statement that if a man with much face intercedes for his less fortunate friend, it is better than a lawsuit[6]. By this he means that if a man's position is great enough, the mere fact of his intercession can solve the problem without recourse to the courts. To our Western minds, this may be something of a revolutionary idea. And yet there is food for thought when one remembers the unnecessarily long waits for hearings made mandatory by the backlog of cases in various courts of the country and the crippling expenses which usually go along with lawsuits.

If one were to argue that this is like bribing the judge or jury, it is well to remember that it is easy to lose face in China through one's deeds. This very fact, then, seems to remove such appeal from the category of bribery, since the man with face enough to intercede will probably not do so for an unworthy cause. It would not be worth it.

Mr. Lin goes on to say that psychological face—which we can identify with prestige—can be granted by those with even more face, may be lost for many reasons (one of which could be by appealing for someone unworthy), fought for, or presented as a gift.[7] Again, if we substitute "prestige" for "face", these ideas begin to seem less strange and rather familiar. Indeed, Lin Yu-tang compares the refusal to give face to our Western expression, "throwing down the gauntlet", and declares that such refusal is the very height of rudeness.[8] To the always polite Chinese, this idea is almost unthinkable. One thinks a long time before he is willing to be considered rude —if he ever is.

But, if the Westerner argues that this Chinese counterpart of prestige or dignity seems hard to grasp because it has so many intangible facets, he is only vaguely aware of what Lin Yu-tang has been able to see so much more clearly. He tells us that "face" is vague and hard to get at.

4 Lin Yu-tang—*My Country and My People* (New York: Halcyon House, 1938) p. 195

5 Lin—*op. cit.*, p. 175

6 Lin—*Ibid.*, p. 197

7 Lin—*op. cit.*, p. 199

8 *Ibid.*, p. 201

It is like so many Chinese ideas—impossible of translation. It is only by living with it that you begin to see some of its ramifications. Let me quote Mr. Lin here and then comment on a few of his points:

> "Face cannot be translated or defined. It is like honor and is not honor. It cannot be purchased with money, and gives a man or woman a material pride. It is hollow and is what men fight for and what many women die for. It is invisible and yet by definition exists by being shown to the public. It exists in the ether and yet can be heard, and sounds eminently respectable and solid. It is amenable, not to reason but to social convention. It protracts lawsuits, breaks up family fortunes, causes murders and suicides, and yet it often makes a man out of a renegade who has been insulted by his fellow townsmen, 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."[9]

On page 2 we have said that using face to avoid a lawsuit is not like bribery because no man with that much face will risk losing it. This seems to be borne out in the statement that face cannot be purchased. If, then, you cannot buy face, you are not apt to subject it to bribery and risk having it withdrawn.

We in the West often speak of being willing to die for honor and, though Mr. Lin says that face is like honor but yet is not the same, still we can see how closely the two parallel.

Again, we of the West often have no more reason for doing something—or not doing it—than that society demands it of us or frowns upon its being done. Ask a mother why she goes in debt over a daughter's wedding and she will cry, "But what will people think if I don't do thus and so?" Even so will the Chinese do the socially conventional or expected thing, even when his own reason might urge him to do otherwise or when what he does seems idiotic to the foreigner.

Mr. Lin's final statement, that face is a hollow thing, seems to be prefatory to his most astonishing remark, that: "Until everybody loses face in this country, China will not become a truly democratic country."[10] This seems a drastic commentary on one's own country; but there is some evidence to believe that he is not far wrong, especially if this statement is really a more drastic way of emphasizing what he said earlier, that anyone with a truly "big" face can be above the law and even the constitution.[11]

Following this paragraph, Mr. Lin goes on to tell us that only if everyone from the top down "loses face" or recognizes that good government—whether in police court, court of law, or in the government houses themselves—is more to the interest of the nation as a whole can China really become a republic.[12] Men in high places must accept that the law is for all, regardless of position

9 Lin—*op. cit.*, p. 200

10 Lin—*op. cit.*, pp. 202, 203

11 Lin—*Ibid.*, p. 199

12 Lin—*Ibid.*, p. 203

or "face", if the country is to know the freedom one expects in a democracy.

It must be borne in mind that Mr. Lin wrote in 1938, a good many years before the Communists overran the mainland. The writer knows little of what life in China may have been like then, and perhaps Mr. Lin was justified in his statement that loss of face by the police and government officials would be necessary for safe traffic, and a true republic.[13] There has been much written on both these problems. Now, more than twenty-five years later, there seems to be a shift in the general feeling of the people, and some have recently made bold demands, through letters and editorials, that government criminal authorities should let the axe fall where it will.[14]

Mr. Lin has touched on a facet of "face" which has a familiar ring when the word is translated into "pull", a legitimate bit of slang for "having the face to ask." He quotes two examples of men who used their positions to obtain what they wanted, with rather dire consequences.

In one case, some soldiers insisted on riding and smoking in a prohibited area of a steamer. Their subsequent carelessness caused the steamer to blow up, killing the soldiers. The other story tells of a general who used his "face" to overload an airplane with his luggage and then insisted on "buzzing" the field after take-off. The crash that followed may not have damaged his "face" but it cost him his leg.[15] Thus, as Mr. Lin says, having too much face is not always an unmixed blessing.

It seems safe, then, to conclude that Lin Yu-tang felt that, though face might work in a man's favor at times, in the. world of today it has little value and much danger if China is to acquire true democracy. One feels that his attitude arises from a conviction that the Chinese are too much concerned with "saving face" or acquiring more and are, thereby, weakening their chances of making a final break with their historic monarchistic background and stepping out into the new era of real democracy, which was the reason for their revolt and successful overthrow of their Manchu rulers fifty-seven years ago.

It is well for us to remember that, if a man does not easily change a habit of a lifetime, how much less easily are cultural patterns of milleniums, seemingly almost inborn in a nation, wiped out and entirely new concepts substituted? We don't say Mr. Lin is wrong; we only recognize that this is a matter requiring rigorous educational policy that has to originate in the very offices that most need the reform and that are headed up by those hardest to change, the older generation.

Miss Hu's Concept

In her article, "The Chinese Concept of Face", Miss Hu Hsien-chin, seems to go very thor-

13 Lin—*Loc. cit.*

14 In a currently unsolved murder case that has implicated a high military man and his wife, two influential Taipei newspaper editors have called for the prosecution of those who committed the murder, regardless of who they are. (CHINA POST, March 15, 1961, p. 1) In the past several years (1965 to date) we have seen countless instances of high government officials, national and provincial, being prosecuted for misconduct in office.

15 Lin—*op. cit.*, p. 202

oughly into the two words used by the Chinese to describe face—*mien-tzu* and *lien*. The former corresponds to the Western idea of prestige[16] and has many meanings, while the latter is concerned with the moral reputation of an individual and is the more important, since loss of *lien* makes *mien-tzu* hard to keep.[17] (Miss Hu says that *mien-tzu* is older than *lien*[18], thus giving the impression that prestige came before morality. There is no explanation as to why this should have been.)

In defining these two terms, Miss Hu says that *mien-tzu* has to do with reputation acquired through one's success or his outward show or cleverness; *lien* is the respect one has for a decent person.[19]

One may lose *lien* by being condemned for behavior frowned upon by society but being accused of a crime does not necessarily cause loss of *lien*, since society may feel some acts are justified by circumstances (murder in self-defense, for example).[20]

To prevent loss of *lien*, a business man may give in to the quarrelsome customer, preferring to lose a profit and maintain his reputation. In the same way, the customer, the student and the servant will endeavour to keep their own *lien* by trying to make the merchant, teacher or employer lose his.[21]

As a man goes up in society, as he acquires education, when he becomes the head of a family or accepts the responsibility of a teacher, he places himself in the position of having to guard his actions to avoid loss of *lien*.[22] The man who gets into financial difficulty will save his *lien* by hiding—thus proving to his creditor that he will surely discharge his debt to save his *lien*, given sufficient time.[23] Even the man in love risks lose of *lien* if his proposal is turned down,[24] while the student who fails in his finals may commit suicide for the same reason.[25] (Probably this last practice is seldom resorted to today.)

One aspect of *lien* that is often irritating to the Western mind is that of belittling oneself or being excessively modest. If we do well, we welcome the plaudits of our friends; but the Chinese will look long-faced and woe-begone or brush off compliments in a way that seems to show lack of confidence or pride in achievement. However, this is his way of guarding his *lien*, since bragging is objectionable and an attitude of self-depreciation raises one in the opinion of others.[26]

Improper behavior will not only affect the individual but it may react on his associates, and this is especially true in the student-teacher relationship. If the student fails, he tells the world that his teacher is lacking in ability;[27] and if he respects his teacher, he does not want that to happen.

When one has lost *lien*, he becomes an unknown quantity because he doesn't care. He has few friends and little else to lose.[28] In the same way, one who does not want face can't be

16 Hu—*op. cit.*, p. 409
17 Hu—*Ibid.*, p. 426
18 Hu—*Ibid.*, p. 410
19 Hu—*Ibid.*, p. 409
20 *Ibid.*, p. 410, 411
21 *Loc. cit.*
22 *Ibid.*, pp. 411, 412
23 *Loc. cit.*
24 *Ibid.*, p. 413
25 *Loc. cit.*
26 *Loc. cit.*
27 *Ibid.*, p. 415
28 *Loc. cit.*

punished by others or receive public censure because it means little to him. Such a person will take advantage of others by selling poor merchandise for good, resort to high pressure selling, lie to make a profit, "sell" favour, or exploit his friends. The only way such a one may be finally subdued is when he gets into trouble. Then he finds himself without moral or material support and even his family will desert him.[29] The Chinese will say such a one does "not want face".

The old and the young are outside the circle of worry about *lien*—the old because age commands respect and the young because it has no meaning yet. Adolescents are conscious of it but are still not old enough to let it worry them too much.[30]

The most severe condemnation one can render in China is to say of another—You "have no face". It is said of traitors and may be said of those suspected of accepting Western religion for material gain. There are three expressions used in this connection which, according to Miss Hu, are:

1. *Tiu lien*—reminder of an error (watch your face)
2. *Bu-yau lien*—emphasizes individual will (don't want face)
3. *Mei-you lien*—individual has lost conscience about flaunting moral standards (doesn't have face)*

Two and three are much stronger than one, and the third one has been in use since the fourth century B. C. [31]

We in the West may speak of a thin-skinned or thick-skinned person, meaning of course that one is hyper-sensitive or insensitive to criticism or rebuke. And *lien* is used in the same way by the Chinese. In this sense, the word means something like having no face or having too much.[32]

In concluding her delineation of *lien*, Miss Hu brings out the fact that *lien* shows real concern on the part of the individual for himself or others and points up the virtues of a decent man who takes care of his *lien*, since one lapse brings on the ridicule of others and repeated offense may result in losing the support of his community.[33] Since community life means the meat and drink of the Chinese, he thinks long before risking it.

Mien-tzu

Turning now to *mien-tzu*, we find it has many meanings, divided into concrete and figurative. The concrete are what we mean in the West by the word *face*, i. e., a person's physical face, "looks", the outer appearance of something, "outer appearance"; direction, "facing east or west, etc." and aspect, "front view".[34]

The figurative meanings seem almost legion and we shall here consider only a few which seem to be of special interest.

The first of these is that meaning which corresponds to our idea of raising or lowering prestige. Here one takes care for his own or that of another. In the latter case, he is careful not

29 *Ibid.*, p. 416 30 *Ibid.*, p. 416, 417

**Tiu lien* means, literally, "dropping or throwing away" one's face, referring to failure or poor performance which makes one feel the sense of shame. *Bu-yau lien* means, literally, "brazen".

31 *Ibid.*, p. 417 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 418, 419

33 *Ibid.*, p. 419 34 *Loc. cit.*

to act so as to make the other lose face. This idea is also used to remind the student or official not to push too hard if he wants to continue to progress.[35]

One aspect of *mien-tzu* which has been of considerable interest to the writer is revealed in what one will do—even to going into debt—to add to his face, or to keep the public from suspecting all is not well.[36] Sometimes one will work to outdo another in some public act in an effort to gain or raise his own *mien-tzu.*[37] And if his own position is secure, he may be disposed to *give face* to another by giving that one some sort of public recognition. Unfortunately, now and again the "giver" may not be sincere and do this in a derogatory way.[38]

The insensitive person may take advantage of one who has committed an error and expose it, thus causing the sinner to lose *mien-tzu.* But the decent man has respect for his fellowman and will try to allow such a person to retain some face to encourage him to reform.[39]

Another meaning of *mien-tzu* is in the negative—I have no face—which confides to the hearer that the speaker is so little known that he can't get something he wants. The speaker may also say, "We have face." This is an expression of friendship that is designed to save the face of another who may be less fortunate.[40]

The Chinese have little regard for brute force. They consider that those who fight to settle something admit that reason is no longer of use. Thus one may say to a belligerent, "Have you no regard for my face?"[41]

And finally, you may hear one say that what he does is a "matter of face", action taken not necessarily willingly but because he must to maintain his own prestige.[42]

Lien and Mien-tzu

In a final comparison of *lien* and *mien-tzu,* Miss Hu comments that both are symbols of the regard a group may have for an individual. *Lien* reveals the confidence that society has in the moral character of a person. If the individual seems to indicate a lack of care for proper behavior, others may doubt his moral character. *Mien-tzu*—prestige—can be borrowed, upheld, worked for, increased, or padded, and it refers to the reputation one has won or lost or the desire for self-exaltation.[43]

One fundamental difference in these two words is that to say one has no *lien* is to convey the worst of insults, while having no *mien-tzu* reveals that one simply failed to gain reputation; and one of the conditions of having *mien-tzu* is to have *lien.* It is almost impossible to keep the latter if one loses the former.[44]

Everyone, be he rich or poor, can claim *lien* if his actions are proper. The poorest peasant wants to keep his *lien* though he may have no chance to gain *mien-tzu.* The middle class man has a chance to gain *mien-tzu;* but, as noted above, his *lien* is vital.[45]

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35 *Ibid.*, p. 420
36 *Loc. cit.*
37 *Ibid.*, p. 421
38 *Lac. cit.*
39 *Ibid.*, p. 422
40 *Ibid.*, p. 424
41 *Ibid.*, p. 424
42 *Ibid.*, p. 425
43 *Ibid.*, p. 426
44 *Loc. cit.*
45 *Ibid.*, p. 427

In bygone days we have used the expression, "His word is as good as his bond." In China, a man having much *lien* could enter into an unwritten agreement with another which was as binding as though he had signed a legal document. There was no difficulty, for the "world" trusted his *lien*.[46]

Experiences with "Face" in China

Having been aware for many years of this facet of Chinese character, one would suppose that the writer, on arriving in China, would have been attune to this to such a degree as to be constantly aware of *face-saving* or *face-gaining* tactics. Such was not the case, however, and the first conscious contact occurred in the spring of 1959.

At that time, through a series of circumstances, the writer found herself supervising the conduct of an oratorical contest in English to select a contestant to compete in an island-wide contest in Taipei. Though a complete novice, she began the process of selecting two from a group of about twenty oral English students to compete with several others from the rest of the university.

On the afternoon of the contest, the two young people went down for a final bit of polishing. As I was preparing to go with them to the contest, I heard one say something to the other in Chinese, but mentioning my name, and I asked for interpretation. "Oh," said one, "we were saying that one of us *must* win to save your face."

Thus casually did I become aware that what Miss Hu said[47] about a student's feeling of double disgrace if he fails might still be true today. Fortunately, for the students' peace of mind, one of my students did win.

Later, after the preliminary contest in Taipei, during which the Tunghai student was chosen as one of five to compete in the finals, he again remarked that he *must* save my face by winning first place at night.

The writer has often felt that, because her student *did* win first place that night, her own position in the university was greatly enhanced. To her it was living in reflected glory; to some, at least, the student saved his face but increased hers.

In contrast with this has been the writer's constant effort on her own behalf to maintain face by controlling her temper. Miss Hu says that the business man will not risk losing face by quarreling with a customer;[48] and this seems to apply to the school teacher or the mistress of a household. Not having an overlygreat amount of patience, life anywhere is a test when things go wrong. But the warning that the Chinese will forgive almost anything but loss of temper has had its effect thus far in keeping the writer under fair control when she misunderstands a student's actions, or lack of them, or finds the cook doing something apparently stupid. As Miss Hu also comments, an educated person must not risk his face by argument with anyone who is his

46 I have no authority for this beyond Miss Hu's statement on p. 427; but I have read a similar statement in various places in other material on China and the Chinese.

47 Hu, *Ibid.*, p. 415 48 *Ibid.*,. 411

educational inferior.[49]

Several years ago my cook risked his face, but was, perhaps, kept from lowering mine,[50] in a bid for a salary raise. Unfortunately for him he chose to wait to plead rising costs until too long after the household of one was doubled in size. Then, because of the language barrier, he chose to go to some students and request them to ask me for a raise. Both errors counting against him, he could not easily press for the raise over protests, thus making me look foolish. At the same time, I was able to preserve his face, in my refusal, by the promise of a suitable adjustment at a later date. Undoubtedly his risking his face was the result of his own unfamiliarity with the forthcoming changes in the household which, when explained, made at least a little sense to him.

Probably one of the most difficult Chinese characteristics for the Westerner to tolerate—particularly through long years of association—is that of "always belittling" oneself. Closely allied to it is the difficulty of getting students, or others, to speak English because they are afraid of making a mistake and being laughed at. In recent years there seems to be a little less fear of laughter, on the part of some students, so that a whole class can enjoy a good laugh when some student says something that sounds humorous to the rest.

With respect to belittling, often young people the writer knows well will shy away from compliments by saying, "Oh, no, I did very badly." This seems unnecessary, particularly when one knows that, underneath, the student is really sure he has been successful but won't admit it because bragging is frowned on.[51] I had one student who, when alone with me, would sometimes admit that he had been successful; but if I commented on his ability to another before him, that same student would demur and look at me almost as if to say, "Don't lose my face."

In the case of speaking English, it seems to be a case of the "thin skin" which is overly sensitive to public opinion.[52] Because English is taught mainly in Chinese, college freshmen often have little idea of how it is properly pronounced. Therefore, they often must be prodded to recite in class or to say anything in public beyond "Yes," or "No," or "I don't know."

Dating, as it is known in the West, is comparatively new in China but it is very popular. However, even in this modern acceptance of a Western custom, one can find, perhaps rather unsuspected by the students, a conformity to public supervision of behavior.[53] When asked why they did not date our university girls more, the boys made the astonishing reply, "Because they usually say 'No' the first time we ask them for a date."

On remarking that the girls are just being "good" girls, one is met with a smile, an expressive shoulder shrug and little or no comment. Plainly, our modern boys still don't like to risk face even in being turned down for a date.

The writer's most astonishing brush with face occurred in February of 1960. A few students had begun to play on the fringes of being dropped from school for failing too many courses. Their purpose was, primarily, to ensure staying on campus for an extra year.

In this game of "flunk, but don't flunk out," a junior English major made a mathematical

49 *Loc. cit.*
50 *Loc. cit.*
51 *Ibid.*, p. 413
52 *Ibid.*, p. 419
53 *Ibid.*, 413

miscalculation and failed three out of five courses at the end of the first semester. Since regulations at that time were that failing so many credits must result in automatic explusion, the student was so informed during the winter vacation. What happened next would be difficult to encounter on a Western campus. The student rushed back to the campus and proceeded to bombard the department head and others, daily, with reasons for his failures, statements that he hadn't realized he was failing so many courses, and protestations of all kinds of extenuating circumstances. Far from committing suicide over a single failure, he tried to be forgiven for three.

It was bewildering to see him still on campus after two or three days of this, and more so when, *two weeks* after classes had begun, he was actively pursuing the same policy. Had he no face? How could he keep on? How could he face the campus? During this period, before he finally accepted defeat, he actually "borrowed face"[54] by getting others whose reputations he thought would help him to intercede for him.

In his discussion of "face", Lin Yu-tang has told us that face "is amenable, not to reason but to social convention."[55] Certainly, it would seem that all of the antics the student described above went through well illustrate what Mr. Lin has said. In a final effort, the student brought his mother here to plead for him, seeming actually to prefer to allow her to share in his disgrace in a public way rather than to attempt to spare her feelings.

In discussing the various meanings of *mien-tzu*, Miss Hu says that the Chinese will attempt to add to their face or struggle to gain face by performing certain public acts that bring favorable comments.[56] These have been vividly illustrated by weddings.

At the first wedding I attended, there was much to see and stimulate comparative thinking; but what was most eye-catching were the dozens of pieces of red material of countless variations. All bore large bold Chinese characters and were hangng all around the hall. I knew these were wedding gifts but what I did not understand was the sacrifice such "gifts" are to "face".

It is quite common for friends to "buy" a piece of red material, have gold characters conveying proper sentiments pasted on the piece, and then present it to the happy couple. Many are sent before the wedding, and custom decrees that they be hung around the room for all to see—and count. It is in the counting that *face* enters into the picture—the more pieces of cloth, the more face. What is incongruous is not the display (who has not edged around wedding-gift-loaded tables in the West?), it is the seeming disregard of depreciation.

After the wedding, these pieces can be, and are, sold back to the men who make a living at this business; but one takes a big loss, as much as 30%, in the sale. Thus, a piece of cloth which cost $200 in the beginning may net the bridal couple only about $140. On a hundred such pieces —not an uncommon number of such gifts—the net loss is considerable Why does such a practice continue? Adding to one's face seems to be worth almost any cost.

Some years ago the wedding of the grandson of the founder of one of Taiwan's largest companies provided a truly remarkable illustration of face-saving. Although the company was teetering on the brink of financial ruin, no expense was spared to engineer a "story-book" wedding

54 *Ibid.*, p. 425

55 Lin, *op. cit.*, p. 200

56 Hu, *op. cit.*, pp. 420, 421

for the young man. Several thousand guests were invited and everything was done in a truly desperate struggle to keep the face of the family.

One final, brief example, noted while in Syracuse, will conclude my observations of *face* among the Chinese. It seems typical of the Chinese fear of failure and consequent loss of face. One of my Chinese housemates, prematurely worried over finances for the coming summer holidays, asked me what she should do. I urged her to tell her department head she might need work. Some time later I asked her what success she had and was told she had not asked. "Why not?" I asked in surprise.

"I was afraid he would think I was too greedy and wouldn't think so much of me," was the shattering reply. What *can* one say to that?

Conclusion

Human nature being what it is, one's calm acceptance of local tradition and national customs is natural, So, too, is it commonplace to consider any departure from the norm—*our* norm, that is—as worthy of comment and criticism. We see nothing strange in the familiar and nearly everything wrong in the unknown. It is only when our narrow horizons begin to broaden that we can begin to realize even hazily that maybe others have a right to their ideas and customs that their ways of conduct are as logical as we feel ours are.

In this presentation we have tried to explain briefly what the Chinese mean by *face* and to show that what they call *face* is the same as what the West calls *prestige* or *dignity*. The Chinese may use more words, or draw finer distinctions but that is consistent with their language pattern and with their inherent characteristic of politeness. They may go to greater lengths to preserve their *face;* but this, too, is consistent with their pattern of life.

In the final analysis, whether you conduct yourself in such a way as to preserve your dignity or prestige; or act or refuse to act so as to save your face, the final outcome is the same. It is primarily a question of terminology; and words are only the means man has of communicating orally with his fellowman. Maybe it is time to stop quibbling over language and pay proper attention to the ideas that language attempts to convey.

N.B. In this paper the use of the pronoun "we" in general refers to people of the same general ances background as the writer, who is from the West.

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Summary of "CHINESE FACE"

This article presents briefly what two Chinese writers--the well-known Lin Yu-tang, and Miss Hu Hsien-chin -- have said about how the Chinese feel about "face". It then illustrates from the writer's personal experiences among the Chinese some of the points made by the two authors.

In presenting Lin Yu -tang's views, the writer quoted his statement, "Until everybody loses face in this country, China will not become a truly democratic country."[1] She then discussed present-day trends toward face-loss among defaulting public officials.

Part two goes into Miss Hu's discussion of mien-tzu and lien, showing how the former corresponds to prestige while the latter is concerned with moral reputation and is the more important since loss of lien makes mien-tzu difficult to keep.[2]

The conclusion is: whether one conducts himself in such a way as to preserve his dignity or prestige or acts or refuses to act so as to save face, the final outcome is the same; it is primarily a question of terminology. What is important is to pay proper attention to the ideas language attempts to convey.

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1. Lin-MY COUNTRY AND MY PEOPLE, P. 202, 203
2. Hu-"Chinese Concept of Face", P. 426

中國人之「面子」之研究提要

這篇文章簡要的表達二位中國作家——著名的林語堂先生和胡先晉女士——所談到中國人對「面子」的看法，隨後作者以個人與中國人相處的經驗來說明這二位作家的觀點。

在陳述林語堂先生的觀點時，作者引了他的一句話：「除非每個中國人都能不顧面子，否則中國不會成爲一個眞正的民主國家」。而討論今天一些違法失職的政府官員對於「面子問題」的態度。

第二個部份說明胡女士所說「面子」與「臉」的問題比較更重要。前者與「威信」有關；後者與『道德』『聲譽』有關。因爲個人如果丟了『臉』，更無『面子』（威信）之可言。

作者的結論是不論中國人所謂『面子』也好，或西洋人所稱『尊嚴』或『威信』也罷。實在是一樣的東西。不過是『字彙』不同的問題。所應注意者，乃在用不同語言所表達同樣的意念而已。