

On the Concept of Face¹

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The concept of face is clarified and distinguished from other closely related constructs: authority, standards of behavior, personality, status, dignity, honor, and prestige. The claim to face may rest on the basis of status, whether ascribed or achieved, and on personal or nonpersonal factors; it may also vary according to the group with which a person is interacting. Basic differences are found between the processes involved in gaining versus losing face. While it is not a necessity for one to strive to gain face, losing face is a serious matter which will, in varying degrees, affect one's ability to function effectively in society. Face is lost when the individual, either through his action or that of people closely related to him, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies. In contrast to the ideology of individualism, the question of face frequently arises beyond the realm of individual responsibility and subjective volition. Reciprocity is inherent in face behavior, wherein a mutually restrictive, even coercive, power is exerted upon each member of the social network. It is argued that face behavior is universal and that face should be utilized as a construct of central importance in the social sciences.

The renowned Chinese writer Lu Hsün once wrote, "But what is this thing called face? It is very well if you don't stop to think, but the more you think the more confused you grow" (1934, p. 129). Although everyone appears to have some notion of what face entails, a precise definition of it proves to be a most difficult task. Lin Yü-tang felt that face was "impossible to define" (1935, p. 202); he said of face that, "abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated" (p. 200).

The concept of face is, of course, Chinese in origin, and the term is a literal translation of the Chinese *lien* and *mien-tzu* (cf. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* [1944]; *Webster's Dictionary* [1958]). Hu (1944) makes an important distinction between two Chinese concepts of face, *lien* and *mien-tzu*, based on two distinct sets of criteria for judging conduct. *Mien-tzu* "stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation" (p. 45). *Lien*, on the other hand, "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character,

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the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. *Lien* is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction" (p. 45). It should be pointed out, however, that the concept of *mien-tzu* is not altogether devoid of moral content. Furthermore, the meanings of *lien* and *mien-tzu* vary according to verbal context and in addition are not completely differentiated from each other in that the terms are interchangeable in some contexts. Consequently, although the distinction between the two sets of criteria for judging face—based on judgments of character and, broadly, of the amoral aspects of social performance—is justified, it cannot be anchored to a linguistic distinction between the two terms, *lien* and *mien-tzu*, as proposed by Hu. However, we may continue to use these terms in the senses that Hu has defined.

The concept of face has not, to date, gained general acceptance as a technical term in the social sciences. It is not, for example, listed in *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* edited by Gould and Kolb (1964) or in the *Dictionary of Behavioral Science* (Wolman 1973). Goffman (1955, p. 213) defines 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." Thus, he seems to treat face as situationally defined, meant to refer only to the immediate respect a person expects others to show in each specific instance of social encounter. He interprets what he calls "face-work" as a subtle style of interpersonal encounter, found in all societies, calculated to avoid personal embarrassment, or loss of poise, and to maintain for others an impression of self-respect (Goffman 1955; 1956; 1959). Stover (1962), however, finds the common interpretation of face as "other-directed self-esteem" to be insufficient for his theory of Chinese social interaction. According to this theory, given the hierarchical structure of Chinese society with its built-in permanency of statuses, social exchange occurs essentially between unequals. Face is "the [Chinese] social ideology which legitimizes status rectitude" (p. 375). More recently, Agassi and Jarvie (1969, p. 151), like Lin Yü-tang, treat face as a "standard of behavior." However, without regard for consistency or precision, these authors also refer to face as "status plus something else, like dignity" (p. 139) (see Ho [1972] for a criticism of their study).

Other writers, taking the meaning of face for granted, have failed to clarify their use of the term. Thus, one finds in the literature that face has been variously confounded with an assortment of sociological as well as nonsociological concepts, such as status, prestige, dignity, honor, and the like. Since a scientific term is rendered superfluous if it can be shown that other terms suffice to describe, explain, or account for the phenomenon in question, in the interests of parsimony "face" should not be added to our

already overgrown body of scientific terms if the concept is reducible to constructs already available in the repertory of the social sciences. If one substitutes other terms, such as "prestige," for "face," however, one is invariably left with a dissatisfaction that some essential component of the concept of face has been left out. It is this "something else," to which Agassi and Jarvie referred, that needs to be delineated. The distinction between face and other constructs, which I want to make in this paper, would justify the incorporation of the term "face" into the scientific vocabulary.

Another major issue regarding the scientific status of the concept of face concerns its range of applicability. It is natural to raise the following question: is face behavior distinctive of the Chinese (and other Oriental peoples which have been heavily under Chinese influence) or is it no less significant in other societies? In other words, to what extent is the concept of face useful in the analysis of social behavior outside of the context of Chinese culture? An adequate answer to this question requires that we turn first to a semantic clarification of what the concept of face entails.

AN ANALYSIS OF FACE

Quantitative versus Qualitative Aspects of *Mien-tzu*

A man of high social standing is said to be *yu mien-tzu* (having *mien-tzu*), while *mei yu mien-tzu* (not having *mien-tzu*) may be used to express having a humble status, or it may be taken to mean that *mien-tzu* has been lost. How much *mien-tzu* a person has is, in general, a function of his social status. But the quantity of a person's *mien-tzu* usually varies according to the group with which he is interacting. Thus, a leader in the Chinese *Triad* society has *mien-tzu* within the underground, but such *mien-tzu* should not be given recognition, at least under proper circumstances, by law-enforcement agents; a military officer should have *mien-tzu* before the men he leads, but may have little *mien-tzu* in the company of a group of intellectuals; again, an academic may have *mien-tzu* among his colleagues, but this *mien-tzu* may not be of much utility in the business community. How much *mien-tzu* a person has, therefore, is not fixed in amount but varies largely according to the social situation in which he is interacting. In losing or gaining *mien-tzu*, too, the group making the judgment must be specified: the loss or gain will vary according to the audience. Only national heroes, scholars who have made lasting contributions to human knowledge, poets of time-honored repute, and the like, come close to having nation-wide *mien-tzu*, unrestricted to specific groups.

Mien-tzu can be characterized, furthermore, not only in quantitative terms but also in qualitative terms. For the claim to *mien-tzu* may rest on a variety of grounds. The status on which *mien-tzu* is based may be as-

cribed or else achieved through competition and individual effort. In the case of achieved status, it is possible to further differentiate *mien-tzu* which rests on the personal qualities underlying achievement from *mien-tzu* which derives more directly from the nonpersonal factors, such as wealth, social connections, and authority, obtained through personal effort. Only nonpersonal factors, of course, are relevant to ascribed status.

It should be pointed out that the remarks pertaining to *mien-tzu* above do not apply to the case of *lien*. For *lien* is something to which everyone is entitled by virtue of his membership in society and can be lost only through unacceptable conduct. As Hu stated, "All persons growing up in any community have the same claim to *lien*, an honest, decent 'face'" (1944, p. 62).

Losing Face versus Gaining Face

Both losing face and gaining face refer, of course, to important changes in the status of one's face; but these changes are not to be construed as simple quantitative ones and, furthermore, must be specified as being relative to the level of what is expected, that is, to the amount to which one is originally entitled. In other words, face is lost or gained only when the changes constitute a departure from the quality or quantity of the individual's claim.

Previous writers on face have treated losing face and gaining face simply as if they were opposite outcomes in a social encounter and have thus failed to notice the basic difference between two social processes that are involved. In the first instance, while it is meaningful to speak of both losing and gaining *mien-tzu*, it is meaningful to speak only of losing *lien*. One does not speak of gaining *lien* because, regardless of one's station in life, one is expected to behave in accordance with the precepts of the culture; correctly conceptualized, exemplary conduct adds not to one's *lien*, but to one's *mien-tzu*.

In the second instance, assessments of social performance leading to losing or gaining face are not made according to criteria which fall on the same unidimensional continuum. It is simply not sufficiently accurate to say that face is lost through unsuccessful social performance and gained through successful performance. Face can, of course, be gained in recognition of what one "deserves," through a diversity of routes such as exemplary behavior, superior performance in some role (as in demonstrating one's competence, trustworthiness, or superior knowledge—particularly when done in modesty), or enhancement of status (as through ostentation or formal promotion to higher office). In all of these, social performance goes above and beyond duty, expectations, or requirements. On the other hand,

face is not necessarily lost as a result of unsuccessful or inferior performance.

Strictly speaking, the opposite of gaining face is a process of erosion, distinguishable from what is called "loss" of face. Decrements in face remain dormant, and social intercourse continues as if the individual were still in possession of his face, until a single incident arises in which his face is put to the test and he fails to protect or "save" it. A physical analogy might help to make this clearer: adding weights to a ship will lower its level at sea, but it will not sink until the overloading goes beyond a critical point—or until the ship meets with a storm beyond its capacity to withstand. "Losing face" is an expression which, properly used, refers only to *public, discrete* events, as do the Chinese expressions *tiu mien-tzu* (losing *mien-tzu*) and *tiu lien*.

A decrease in the amount of face due the individual need not mean losing face. As a common example, we may cite the case of someone whose status is lowered on account of circumstances beyond his control and in which no personal disgrace is implied. A man who turns from rich to poor due to some misfortune will have less claim to *mien-tzu*, but he does not *lose face* in the process. Face may be lost when conduct or performance falls below the minimum level considered acceptable or when certain vital or essential requirements, as functions of one's social position, are not satisfactorily met. To investigate the conditions under which face is lost, therefore, one must delineate which expectations placed upon the individual are regarded as the vital or essential requirements, that is, as the prerequisites or imperatives. The individual has no choice but to satisfy these requirements. For failing to do so would reveal basic incongruities between the individual's social inaptitude or unworthiness and the social recognition he claims to deserve.

Thus, face is not lost merely on account of a failure to gain it, but face must be protected from being lost precisely because of the demoralizing repercussions which otherwise follow. At stake is nothing less than the effective maintenance of one's standing in society. And face which has been lost may be regained, through compensation, corrective actions, making up for one's shortcomings, etc.; but regaining face does not constitute gaining face—it is merely a restoration to the individual of what ought to have been due him in the first place.

It is profitable, in this connection, to relate face to the psychological concept of defensiveness. Face behavior takes on a defensive quality when the individual appears to be excessively concerned with protecting his face—relative to the objective requirements of the situation *in his cultural context*. This is more likely to occur when at some level he senses danger signals (which may be exaggerated) that his face is being threat-

ened and that he does not have the resources to protect its integrity. In any event, the more defensive the individual is, the more awkward and ineffective he is likely to be in his face-protection maneuvers. That the concept of defensiveness is not directly relevant to the dynamics involved in gaining face is another illustration of the fact that losing face and gaining face are not simply opposites of each other.

Now it seems to me that the social dynamics involved in losing face are more deserving of our attention than those involved in gaining face—in terms of both the knowledge that can be derived with respect to social demands and prerequisites and the seriousness of the implications for the one whose face is under judgment. Not everyone is eager or needs to gain face; but everyone who cares for maintaining a minimum level of effective social functioning must see to it that his face is protected from being lost. Whether face is gained or not does not in itself bring into question one's social aptitude, decency, or adequacy, but whether face is lost or not does.

While losing face is, as has been stated, a discrete event, it need not be an all-or-none phenomenon. There are gradations in the severity of losing face, gauged according to the consequences. It is the extent to which a particular person's social functioning is adversely affected that constitutes the true measure of what losing face means to him. The notion of social adequacy is of particular relevance here. An individual's face, and hence his social adequacy, is maintained, relative to his social position, to the extent that he is able to satisfy the minimum requirements society has placed on him; his social adequacy is not maintained, or at least it is questioned, to the extent that he has lost face as a result of his inability to measure up to expectations in his social performance. Since different facets of one's social functioning may be affected, the extensiveness of losing face can be construed to lie on a continuum ranging from adverse consequences affecting only a circumscribed area of social life to the total question of one's fitness as an acceptable member of society. Failures to maintain one's social status, to function adequately in a given role, or to safeguard integrity of character in one's general conduct will all make the loss of face a likely possibility, but to varying degrees of seriousness. Thus, losing face must be understood with respect to the facet of social life affected—which in turn must be tied to the different sets of expectations placed upon the individual—if we are to have an idea of how serious the implications are to the person concerned (see Ho [1974] for a further discussion of this issue).

Another way of viewing the severity of losing face is to consider the temporary-permanent or reversible-irreversible dimension. In most instances, face lost can be regained. However, the loss of face may well be permanent in cases where the misconduct is serious and in direct contradiction to role-imperatives and/or taboos. Examples of such cases are a

captain found guilty of cowardly abandoning his ship and crew to save his own life, a priest caught in adultery, or a family disgraced by incestuous relationships. Not infrequently, the loss of face has such serious consequences that it leads to suicide. Committing suicide may be a final attempt to prevent a total loss of face, or perhaps even to reclaim some measure of it. Thus, in traditional Chinese society women often had to commit suicide to demonstrate their innocence, should the misfortune of being raped (or being widely suspected of being raped) befall them. Outside of the Chinese context, we may also enumerate examples of suicide intended to prevent a total loss of face, as in the case of a commander-in-chief beaten in battle who shoots himself to avoid the humiliation of being captured alive. (These examples illustrate how a person's face is often at the mercy of circumstances beyond his control—see the discussion on the relationship between face and individual responsibility below.) Indeed, face can be more important than life itself. As Goffman (1955, p. 219) puts it, one's face is "a sacred thing."

The Reciprocity of Face and Social Control

Since social expectations are reciprocal in nature, potential conflicts arise when there is a discrepancy between what a person expects or claims from others and what others extend to him. The possibility of losing face can arise not only from the individual's failure to meet his obligations but also from the failure of others to act in accordance with his expectations of them—that is, not only from the individual's own actions, but also from how he is treated by others. Moreover, the individual's face may be threatened by actions which are not aimed directly at him: a lack of deference shown by others to his friends, relatives, or subordinates, for instance, could also be interpreted as depriving him of face. (The individual would not, however, interpret a lack of deference shown toward his superior as a direct challenge to his own face, although he too may lose face if his superior does.)

A man who has *mien-tzu* is in a position to exercise considerable influence, even control, over others in both direct and indirect ways. At the same time, however, he is under strong constraint to act in a manner consistent with the requirements for maintaining his *mien-tzu* as well as for reciprocating a due regard for the *mien-tzu* of others. Thus, the concern for face exerts a mutually restrictive, even coercive, power upon each member of the social network. Much of the time the individual's actions, far from being directed by his own wishes, are in effect dictated by the necessity of meeting the expectations of others.

A clarification should be made with respect to face and its relationship to social control. Control over others on the basis of *mien-tzu* is different

from that based on authority. First, a person occupying a position of authority certainly has *mien-tzu*, but a person who has *mien-tzu* need not have authority, at least not formal authority. Control based on authority is legitimate control, whereas that based on *mien-tzu*, even when derived from authority, often extends beyond the realm of legitimacy. For instance, insofar as an employee is performing his duties as specified by his job, he is obligated to follow the instructions of his employer; but it may well be out of a consideration for the *mien-tzu* of his employer that he complies with a request which goes beyond the formal requirements of duty, for example, accompanying his employer to social functions, or doing things of a personal nature for him. Second, whereas face is attached to persons, authority, or institutionalized power, as Bierstedt has argued (1950), is always attached to statuses, not to persons. Third, authority relationships may be either unilateral or bilateral, depending on the amount of power that one party may exert on the other. Authority is unidirectional, and it is possible to specify clearly which individuals in a social domain are under one's control. By contrast, social control based on face is invariably reciprocal in nature.

WHAT FACE IS NOT

We are now in a position to make a more precise distinction between face and other concepts and to say what face is not—an analytic exercise which should help to eliminate much of the muddled thinking found in the literature on the subject.

Face Is Not a Standard of Behavior

Face is not a standard of behavior; rather, a more accurate formulation is that judgments concerning the extent, loss, or gain of face are based on sets of criteria or standards which vary both cross-culturally and over time within a single culture. These standards are rooted ultimately in the value orientations of a given culture at a particular point in time. Changes in the criteria for judging face are both a manifestation and a cause of social change; they are particularly pronounced when rapid social changes are taking place. The kinds of behavior judged to be face losing serve as an especially sensitive indicator of the prevailing mores and morality of the times. Thus, a society in which, as a Chinese saying puts it, "The poor are laughed at, but not the prostitutes," is one whose moral fibers have obviously decayed.

The study of face, therefore, gives us insight into not only the nuances of social interaction but also the kinds of values that are upheld in a given society, particularly those values which are deemed to be prerequisites for

all its adult members. Two types of comparative studies of face are meaningful: (a) charting the changes in the criteria for judging face through time within a given culture (or subculture), and hence the corresponding changes in values orientations, and (b) highlighting the prevailing modes in which people maintain, lose, and gain face in different cultures, to reveal the underlying cross-cultural differences in social relationships and values.

Face Is Not a Personality Variable

Questions of face arise, not in the private process of self-evaluation, but in social encounters where the evaluations by others of oneself are perceived to be of significance to the maintenance of one's standing in society. Face is not a personality variable: it is not invariant with respect to all situations. That is, face is not an attribute located within the individual; instead, it is what others have recognized and extended to him. Of course, face may be enhanced or lost, as I have indicated, on account of one's personal qualities—but only when these qualities are manifest, given notice by society, and where there is a consensus in judgments of them.

That face is not a personality variable has been recognized by both Goffman (1955) and Stover (1962). Goffman states that "the person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them" (p. 214). As expressed by Stover, "One's face is somehow really one's *location* in a social system, not a personal attribute" (p. 367).

Face, *ming-yü* (reputation),² and prestige all differ from personality in that they comprise not the individual's characteristics themselves but the consensus of the collection of judgments passed upon him by others. A concern with face, *ming-yü*, or prestige is indicative of other-directedness, that is, having a sensitivity to how one appears in the eyes of others and a tendency to act in ways which meet their approval.

The theoretical distinction made between face and personality has important methodological implications. Face is not to be regarded as a con-

² *Ming-yü* refers not to the personal qualities of the individual but to the sum total of judgments passed on these qualities by others on the basis of his overall conduct in life. *Ming-yü* differs from prestige in that it focuses on the evaluative dimension of good-versus-bad rather than on the amount of respect and confidence one commands. Thus, one speaks of a person as having a good or bad *ming-yü*. A person with little prestige may still have a sound *ming-yü*, but it is unlikely that a person with an overall bad *ming-yü* can have much prestige. Another difference between the two concepts is that, while prestige may be earned or ascribed, a sound *ming-yü* must be earned.

struct pertaining to personal qualities inferred from behavior. Accordingly, any measurement of face should not be based upon a direct study of the individual himself; rather, a person's face should be ascertained by conducting enquiries on the opinions that others have of him. Stated simply, a person's face is assessed in terms of what others think of him; the assessment does not include what a person thinks of himself, but may include what he thinks others think of him. Of course, misjudgments concerning one's own face can be made; that is, one's subjective assessment of one's face may be at variance with that of the group. Such misjudgments will act as a source of strain in one's interpersonal relationships.

In viewing face as being external to the individual and hence not as a personality variable, I have treated face in this paper as a sociological, rather than psychological, construct. The psychological sequel to a loss of face is the experience of shame.³ But one must be careful not to conclude that the reaction of shame is inevitable. Whether or not shame is experienced depends on the subjective definition of the situation by the individual concerned. Among other things, the degree of ego involvement is a major factor in the definition. It is possible that the individual may play the game of face with emotional detachment, particularly when it involves an area of social functioning having to do with such things as the ostensible display of one's standing in society rather than with what would reflect upon him as a person. In any case, losing *lien* is more likely than losing *mien-tzu* to be accompanied by the reaction of shame. The relationship between losing face and shame can be further clarified. One does not

³ My own interpretation of shame and guilt is that they differ from each other in the following respects: (a) Guilt is internalized (i.e., may be felt even in the absence of an audience or when a person's wrongful actions are unknown to others), but shame may or may not be internalized. (b) The judgmental-evaluative dimension underlying guilt is moral. Guilt is experienced when a person "senses" that his thoughts and/or deeds are morally unacceptable to his internalized societal values. The possible conditions leading to shame, however, are much broader: one can feel ashamed not only of his thoughts and actions but also of his body (e.g., its lack of attractiveness), incompetence (despite having tried one's best), humble condition in life, heritage, country, etc. (c) Personal responsibility is always involved in guilt but not necessarily in shame, as the examples above illustrate—that one can be ashamed of nonpersonal entities or conditions over which one has no control. (d) The psychological correlate of guilt is the fear of punishment or retaliation by an adversary more powerful than oneself. In the case of shame, it is the fear of being ridiculed or "laughed at," consequential to the exposure, real or imaginary, of one's weaknesses, failures, "evils," etc., in front of others: it is like a person left in a psychological state of nakedness, after having been stripped of his persona or external protection. (e) The effects of shame are more pervasive and incapacitating (even devastating and paralyzing) than those of guilt. It is easier to make up for guilt and pacify the conscience through confession, atonement, work, self-denial, etc.; shame often persists like a psychic scar, the prescription for the healing of which is less certain.

In view of these differences, there are sound theoretical reasons for linking the loss of face to shame rather than to guilt. For a further discussion of shame and losing face, see Eberhard (1967) and Ho (1974).

lose (or gain) face alone but always before some group of people; however, the feeling of shame can be experienced privately even without the presence of an audience—that is, the sense of shame can be internalized (see Eberhard [1967], especially p. 124, where shame is defined as “the reverse side of honor”). One might conceive of internalized shame as “losing face before oneself.”

Face Is Not Status, Dignity, or Honor

Status relationships possess properties of their own which can be characterized independently of the individuals occupying the respective statuses. A status, relative to other statuses, defines the location of the person within the social system, regardless of what his individual personality may be. It functions as a major determinant of how much *mien-tzu* a person has. Nevertheless, face is not directly attached to statuses, but to persons occupying them.

Webster's Dictionary defines face as “the outward appearance or semblance of dignity or prestige” (1958, p. 906). The connotative meaning of dignity differs from that of face in that the inner qualities of the individual are emphasized. Dignity is what one strives to attain through leading a way of life superior in quality to that of merely keeping face. *Lien* is, however, more basic than dignity in the sense that having *lien* is a prerequisite for achieving dignity.

Face is a more inclusive concept than honor as well as dignity. Honor may be viewed as a special kind of face that is claimed by certain elitist groups in society. Membership in these groups entitles the individual to special privileges and honor and yet, at the same time, obligates him to observe a set of well-prescribed stringent requirements (i.e., a code of honor) that go far above and beyond those for the masses. For the Confucian scholar-officials of traditional China, the knights of medieval England, and the samurai of Tokugawa Japan, honor was, at least according to ideology, more important than life.

Lin Yü-tang (1935, p. 200) asserts that “To confuse face with Western ‘honor’ is to make a grievous error.” He explains the difference between face and honor by means of specific examples: “In the West, the man who is slapped on the cheek and does not offer a challenge for a duel is losing ‘honor’ but not losing face. On the other hand, the ugly son of a *taot’at*, who goes to a sing-song girl’s house, is insulted and returns with a company of police to order the arrest of the sing-song girl and the closing of the house, is getting ‘face,’ but we would hardly say he is guarding his ‘honor’ ” (p. 201). The quotation above illustrates simply that different standards of behavior are involved in judgments of face versus Western “honor,” made in different sociocultural contexts (though one could seriously question

Lin's interpretation that a man who is slapped and does not respond with a challenge "is losing 'honor' but not losing face").

Face Is Not Prestige

Among the sociological constructs, prestige appears to come closest in meaning to face. Prestige may of course be earned or ascribed. However, for the sake of the following analytic exercise, I shall focus only on the distinction between face and earned personal prestige. Personal prestige may be defined as the amount of respect and confidence invested in the individual by the group; if earned, it is through having a commonly acknowledged performance record of demonstrated competence, expertise, trustworthiness, integrity of character, and other valued personal qualities. Defined in this way, prestige is more closely associated with the individual rather than directly with his rank or office.

In making a distinction between authority and prestige, Simmel wrote (1950, p. 184), "prestige leadership stems from pure personality, even as authority stems from the objectivity of norms and forces." In a similar vein, Bierstedt argued that prestige should not be identified with power. He wrote (1950, p. 731), "knowledge, skill, competence, ability, and eminence . . . are all components of, sources of, or synonyms of prestige, but they may be quite unaccompanied by power." It can also be said that, whereas prestige is essentially rooted in public judgments of the personal qualities of the individual as they are manifest in his social performance, status judgments can be made on the basis of some objective criteria which differentiate individuals hierarchically within the social order quite independently of their personal qualities. (Status judgments, however, can be made subjectively and are thus dependent upon the value hierarchy held by the person making them as well as upon his own assessment of the one being judged [cf. Goldhamer and Shils 1939, pp. 171–82]. In this case, the criteria for judgments of prestige and status need not be dissimilar.) As mentioned by Linton (1936, pp. 113–19), among the irreducible bases for the determination of status are age, sex, and occupation. The first two of these are determinants of ascribed statuses, and as such they are obviously not directly relevant to judgments of personal prestige. The last, occupation, may be included among the determinants of prestige; but even here, how the person obtained his job (whether through ascription or achievement, and whether through *jen shih kuang-hsi* [personal relations] or on the basis of qualification) and especially the record of performance can be of greater significance to the determination of prestige than the nature of the occupation itself.

What I want to argue is that the correlation between changes in the amount of face and that of personal prestige is not a perfect one. The

bases for status judgments, and hence of face, are more inclusive than those for judgments of prestige. Whereas judgments of earned prestige (and of *ming-yü* as well) involve only personal factors, judgments of face include nonpersonal as well as personal factors, as has already been pointed out. Face is thus more encompassing than *ming-yü* or prestige.

Accordingly, it is altogether possible that a person may have face but not personal prestige or vice versa. Like those of face, prestige judgments depend largely on the audience involved. An official of high rank certainly has face, but not necessarily prestige; a poor scholar may have prestige, but not much face; the son of a prominent man has face, but, unless he has demonstrated himself to be worthy in some respect, he may have little or no prestige; but the man of social prominence, who has also earned the respect of the community, has both face and prestige. In sum, it may be said that prestige is one of the sources of the claim to face, but the converse of this proposition cannot be made unequivocally without doing injustice to the distinctiveness of the two concepts as delineated above.

Bearing in mind the distinction between the dynamics involved in gaining versus losing face, I shall keep the analysis of their respective relationships with prestige separate. The interaction of "losing versus gaining" and "face versus prestige" results logically in a matrix of four specific relationships which I shall discuss one by one. It would appear, though, that as compared with the relationship between losing face and losing prestige, that between gaining face and gaining prestige involves social processes which are less dissimilar.

1. When prestige is gained, face is gained—though not necessarily proportionately.

2. When face is gained, prestige is not necessarily gained—as when the face is gained through an ostentatious display of wealth.

3. When prestige is lost, there will result a corresponding (though, again, not necessarily proportionate) decrease in the amount of face, or at least an erosion of the basis for one's claim to face. But one must be careful not to conclude that face is necessarily *lost* concomitantly with a loss of prestige. We are reminded of the conditions for losing face which I have mentioned earlier, namely, when performance is judged to have fallen below the minimum acceptable level or when certain essential expectations placed upon the individual are not met. Herein lies the secret of how the mechanisms differ in the loss of face versus the loss of prestige. Prestige may be lost *gradually*; the process is continuous, and the effects are cumulative. The entire past record of performance is taken into account, however imperfectly, in prestige judgments.

4. When face is lost, prestige is lost, but the effect is most serious when face is lost on account of manifest flaws in personal qualities. Also, one can certainly think of events in which face is affected without a correspond-

ing effect on prestige, in particular, events for which the person concerned can be hardly held responsible. An unfortunate loss in family fortune, for instance, will result in a decrease (not a loss) of the amount of one's face in the community—but one does not lose prestige in the process.

Two more distinctions deserve emphasis. First, the claim to prestige is clearly not an inalienable right, but everyone, regardless of his station in life, is entitled to the claim of *lien*—unless it is forfeited on account of his own unacceptable conduct. One can live quite comfortably without prestige, but can hardly do so without *lien*; to strive to preserve one's face is a prerogative.

Second, the individual alone is held accountable for his conduct and hence how much prestige he deserves; but a person's face can be lost or gained as a result of the behavior of someone else (particularly someone with whom he is closely related). Furthermore, one's actions can affect someone else's face—even that of one's ancestors. For instance, among the Chinese, "My face is totally lost because of you" is an accusation that the offending party's action has resulted in an injury to one's face. In particular, the individual's face and the good name of his family (his *chia sheng*) were virtually inseparable in traditional Chinese society.

It might be objected that the distinction I have just made is not intrinsic to the two concepts of prestige and face, and that the basis for this distinction rests on an inconsistency—in that I have applied the Western individualistic model to prestige judgments, and the Chinese social-behavior model of mutual dependence to face judgments. Surely it can be argued that, given the high degree of mutual dependence in Chinese interpersonal relations, not being held solely accountable for the fate of one's own face is to be expected. Moreover, the behavior of closely related persons is included in the evaluation of one's prestige. Thus, the prestige of a scholar-official suffers as a result of his son's misconduct.

The objection raised above is a valid one, and it may be said that the distinction between prestige and face (with respect to the differing weights of the effects of someone else's behavior on judgments of them) is only a relative one. However, it should be pointed out that in Chinese society prestige is affected by the behavior of others only when there is a tacit implication that one is not to be absolved of responsibility for this behavior. One loses prestige via someone else's misconduct only if it reflects on one's own failures. In the example of the scholar-official above, the son's misconduct is taken to be a reflection of the father's failure to educate the younger generation properly. Like his son, he is guilty of unfiliality—in having brought disgrace to the family and hence to the ancestors—and this, of course, is damaging to his prestige. The conclusion, therefore, is that personal responsibility is inevitably involved, however indirectly, in judgments of personal prestige but not necessarily in judgments of face.

FACE AS A UNIVERSAL

One of the points of contention concerning face centers on the question raised in the beginning of this paper: does the concept of face have universal applicability? To put the question differently: is face behavior distinctively Chinese, or at least more prominent by far in Chinese society than in other societies?

The controversy concerning whether or not face is a universal arises partly from the level of generality at which the concept is defined. In the preceding analysis, face was treated in terms of its general significance to adequate social functioning, which is, of course, a matter of universal concern. Throughout the writing of the present paper, I have been conscious of the fact that the presentation of self vis-à-vis others is a basic problem that no one, in any society, can avoid. It must have occurred to many readers that, outside of the Chinese social context, social encounters which may indeed be regarded as instances of face behavior can be observed—even though they are typically not described or interpreted in such terms. Most of the illustrations I have used above are not specific to the Chinese.

Not to embarrass people in public may be cited as an example of *liu mien-tzu* (saving someone else's *mien-tzu*). "Keeping up with the Joneses," games of "one-upmanship" (popularized by Stephen Potter [Goffman 1959, p. 191], and the challenges to gun duels in the 19th-century American West are more aggressive forms of face behavior. In diverse cultural contexts, men continue to perform daring feats which may cost them dearly, including the loss of their lives, for fear of the consequences of losing face. Of late, the face of males vis-à-vis females (or what has been referred to as the "male ego") is being seriously challenged, and is perhaps undergoing changes, with the advent of the women's liberation movement. Codes of honor, to which elitist groups in many societies are bound, constitute a special kind of face. Thus, among the European aristocracy challenges to a duel had to be accepted to avert the stigma of cowardice, even though the one challenged might well know in advance that his chances of survival were grim. And anyone who is skilled in the negotiation of disputes knows very well that face is a factor to be reckoned with, aside from the more obvious issues of self-interest of the parties concerned. Indeed, face is immanent in human conflicts, both in their avoidance and resolution (see Ho [1974] for a discussion of face and its relationship with conflicts).

The point is that face is distinctively human. Anyone who does not wish to declare his social bankruptcy must show a regard for face: he must claim for himself, and must extend to others, some degree of compliance, respect, and deference in order to maintain a minimum level of effective social functioning. While it is true that the conceptualization of what constitutes face and the rules governing face behavior vary considerably across

cultures, the concern for face is invariant. Defined at a high level of generality, the concept of face is a universal.

Now, the Western mentality, deeply ingrained with the values of individualism, is not one which is favorably disposed to the idea of face. For face is never a purely individual thing. It does not make sense to speak of the face of an individual as something lodged within his person; it is meaningful only when his face is considered in relation to that of others in the social network. Thus, in social encounters, the question of face frequently arises beyond the realm of the individual's own responsibility—that is, not only from his actions, but also from (*a*) the actions of people closely associated with him which have a bearing on his face, and (*b*) how he and people with whom he is closely associated are treated by others. Reciprocity is the key to the understanding of face behavior: to extend face to others is no less important than to safeguard one's own.

The analysis of face behavior thus leads to a more explicit recognition of how the roles of individual responsibility and subjective volition are circumscribed in social interactions. This would appear to have the effect of diminishing the stature of man as an individual who seeks to gain mastery over the environment and over his own psychic life and destiny. I submit, however, that the portrayal of man under the ideology of individualism represents only one idealized version of his social existence. It does not reflect the true state of affairs—namely, that much of the time man is subject to the impact of social actions beyond his control and responsibility and that his subjective volitions are constrained by the necessity of having to meet the social expectations of others, to a greater extent than individualism would lead us to appreciate. I do not wish to imply that the expectations of others toward oneself are excluded from consideration in the ideology of individualism. Rather, others' expectations are existent insofar as they have been incorporated into the individual's own subjective frame of reference, that is, into his own definition of their significance for his own action. The individual, and not the reciprocity between individuals, remains the focal point of concern. In relegating the concept of face to the status of having only particularistic, rather than universal, applicability, or in saying that face behavior is of minor significance in Western societies, the individualism-dominated social sciences fall victim to one of their blind spots. To be sensitive to the variations in which face behavior is manifest in the daily lives of men under a diversity of cultural conditions would give fresh ammunition to the social sciences toward a major breakthrough from their present intellectual encapsulation.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis serves to elucidate the ramifications of the concept of face and to distinguish it from other closely related concepts. We are

now prepared to advance a definition of this complex concept. Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him. In terms of two interacting parties, face is the reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each party expects from, and extends to, the other party.

In the course of attempting to achieve a conceptual clarity for face, it is also necessary to clarify the relationship between it and other sociological concepts. In this paper, I have treated face as a key concept that ties together a number of separate sociological concepts, such as status, authority, prestige, and standards of behavior. Face is a concept of central importance because of the pervasiveness with which it asserts its influence in social intercourse. It is virtually impossible to think of a facet of social life to which the question of face is irrelevant. The desire to gain face, to avoid losing face, and to save face when it is threatened is a powerful social motive. The study of face dynamics promises to elucidate the subtleties of social interaction—and if face is a complex concept, it is so because social interaction is itself a highly complicated affair. It is probably on account of its potential to reflect the complexities of social interaction that the study of face is rendered intriguing to students of human behavior.

The distinction which I have made between face on the one hand and personality and personal prestige on the other is a basic one with great theoretical import. It reflects two fundamentally different orientations in viewing human behavior: the Western orientation, with its preoccupation with the individual, and the Chinese orientation, which places the accent on the reciprocity of obligations, dependence, and esteem protection. These two orientations need not, and should not, be regarded as mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary. Neither, when taken alone, is capable of yielding a complete account of the total complexity of social phenomena.

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