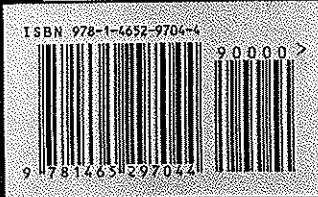


RELATIONSHIPS COMMUNICATION

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RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNICATION

in East Asian Cultures:

China, Japan and South Korea

Guowei Jian • George Ray

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Yanrong (Yvonne) Chang, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, USA. She was the recipient of the 2003 Dissertation Award of the Language & Social Interaction Division of the National Communication Association (NCA). Her research interests are culture and communication, language and social interaction, cultural identities, persuasion, and ethnography of communication. Her works have appeared in *Communication Teacher*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *China Media Research*, *the International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, *Narrative Inquiry*, and *Discourse & Society*, among others.

Chin-Chung Chao, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Communication at University of Nebraska at Omaha, USA. Her primary research interests span conflict management, leadership, intercultural communication, organizational communication, and media communication. She served as the President of Association for Chinese Communication Studies (ACCS) in 2011–2012 and the Chair of Asian/Pacific American Communication Studies Division (APACS) in 2012–2013. In addition, she has served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (2011–2016) and *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* (2015–2017).

Jensen Chung, Ph.D. is Professor of Communication at San Francisco State University, USA. His research interests include organizational communication, leadership communication, and intercultural communication. His current primary research interest is in the *chi (qi)* theory of communication. His research appears in *Computer Information System*, *Mass Communication Research*, *Communication Quarterly*, *Communication & Society*, *The Howard Journal of Communications*, *Intercultural Communication Studies*, *Intercultural & International Communication Annual*, and *China*

research interest is personal development in intercultural settings focusing on various cultural groups such as migrated families in Japan, Japanese families overseas, foreign students, and employees in multinational corporations. She has been serving several journals and associations as an editor and a board member and is currently an editor for *Journal of Intercultural Communication*.

George B. Ray, Ph.D. is Professor of Communication at Cleveland State University, USA. Professor Ray's principal area of research is language and social interaction. He has conducted ethnographic research in Appalachian communities, studied micro-level interactional processes during initial encounters and in physician-patient communication, and has also investigated language attitudes toward Standard American English and New Zealand English. In 2009, he published *Language and Interracial Communication in the United States: Speaking in Black and White*. His research has appeared in prominent journals such as *Communication Monographs*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*.

Linda G. Seward, Ph.D. is Professor of Communication Studies at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, USA. Her primary interests are in cultural diversity, whether within the United States or in cultures around the world. She has taught in four study abroad programs and contributed to study abroad orientations. She was selected as a participant in the ASIANetwork Japan Seminar as well as for a Malone Fellowship to study the Middle East. She has served on the Executive Board for the Study of Communication, Language and Gender (OSCLG) and is on the editorial board of *Women and Language*.

Sachiyo M. Shearman, Ph.D. is Associate Professor in the School of Communication at East Carolina University, USA. She teaches courses such as Cross-Cultural Communication, Conflict and Communication, Social Influence, and Research Methods at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Her research has been published in journals such as *Communication Quarterly*, *Communication Research Reports*, *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *Journal of Family Communication*, *The International Journal of Human Resources Management*, and *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*.

Miai Sung, Ph.D. is Professor in the Department of Home Economics at Korea National Open University, South Korea. She has researched the change or continuity of traditional Korean family values and norms, especially family concepts, filial piety, family lineage, etc. She also studied post-divorce adaptation, family lives of women-headed families, poverty, and retiree's life satisfaction. She is currently studying sibling relationships, unmarried single women's lives, childless couple's lives, and Korean American's life ritual and identity. She is chief editor of the *Journal of Family Relations* in South Korea.

Dexin Tian, Ph.D. is Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Yangzhou University, China. His teaching and research interests lie in public speaking, intercultural communication, and intellectual property rights from the cultural perspective. He is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* and *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*.

Ming Xie is a research assistant at Institute of Journalism and Communication, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China. She was a visiting scholar of School of Communication, University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2015. Her research interests are intercultural communication, public policy and communication, religion and communication.

Youqi Ye is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Information and Communication at Meiji University, Japan. She is also a part-time lecturer in School of Cross-Cultural Studies and School of Modern Management, Sugiyama Jogakuen University, Japan. Her major field of study is intercultural communication. Her research focuses on adjustment of Japanese expatriates and their families and the career development of foreign students in Japan. Her research interests include gender roles, family relations, social networks, and ethnic community.

CHAPTER 3

FRIENDSHIP, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, AND COMMUNICATION IN CHINA

CHIN-CHUNG CHAO, DEXIN TIAN AND MING XIE

Although communication is a global phenomenon, communication research, in the past few decades, has been primarily Western-dominated (Hofstede, 2001). As Hofstede put it, Eurocentrism is still a permeated ideology around the world and among every field of study. Since Eurocentrism has been recognized as a global normal expression of culture and may deny or degrade other cultural perspectives, non-Western views on communication studies are greatly needed (Miike, 2006). This chapter aims to serve as a genuine invitation for more culturally conscious discussions about Chinese interpersonal relationship in general, and friendship and romantic relationships in China in particular. The remainder of the chapter consists of a brief introduction to the impacts of globalization on human relationships and cultural construction of intimate relationships with elaborate discussions about friendships and romantic relationships in China. This chapter also makes consistent conceptual and practical comparisons and contrasts between the East with China as a representative and the West with the United States as a representative for a better understanding of the impacts of the dominant cultural values upon social patterns of behavior in intimate relationships.

■ Impacts of Globalization on Human Relationships

Globalization interconnects all parts of the world. During the past decades, China has arguably placed great importance on reforming and modernizing its culture and traditions. Several key features of Chinese culture have existed

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in the Chinese societies for thousands of years. Some of them are still valid in modern Chinese societies, whereas others are changing. Because of the pressure from both the collectivistic culture and hierarchical structure, the Chinese people have had a tendency to subordinate their individual goals and interests to the wishes of superiors as well as to those of the group. No wonder it is still widely believed that one's own emancipation can be possible only through the normative and structural changes in the family system (Yang, 1959, p. 168). With the increasing influence of Western individualistic values since the early twentieth century and the inexorably evolving forces resulting from industrialization and urbanization, the Chinese family system emphasizing collectivism has slowly, but definitely, been eroded (Wong, 1975). Moreover, it is not just that the internal family structure has been weakened; the individual's life space has been extended more and more from this primary group into secondary groups. As a result, the Chinese individual is no longer tightly locked in a family structure but finds himself in quite a new social situation where the individual is given a much broader scope for self-expression.

Historically, with the influence of collectivistic culture and Confucianism, any romantic relationship was considered detrimental to the supremacy of filial piety in the family. Given the emphasis on family interests, the mate for marriage was decided by parents or superiors in the family. Because marital relations were considered a filial duty to the family, the choice was more important for parents taking a daughter-in-law to continue the family line and to help out with the household chores than for the son taking a wife (Baker, 1979). Personal emotion and free will based on love were considered not only unnecessary but also harmful. So it was common that many couples did not love each other, but they still stayed together to continue their responsibilities to their families.

Traditionally, the Chinese also emphasized the importance for decent young people not to mingle or fall in love until they were married. However, parents never fully succeeded in keeping boys and girls apart or in eliminating love from their lives. Premarital sex was forbidden for both genders, but the rule was more strictly enforced for girls than for boys. Young men's sexual experimentation was more likely with prostitutes or household servant girls (Levy, 1971). Although most parents and the society still consider premarital sex unacceptable nowadays, more and more young people think it acceptable, especially when two people are in love. In contemporary China, people's conception of mate selection has experienced dramatic changes. When selecting their partners many young people

in China tend to emphasize interactions with a strong ethical dimension, rather than family responsibilities.

To sum up, because of the influences of Western values and as a result of the social progress in China, the Chinese cultural values have gradually been changing. In the age of globalization, more and more contradictions and conflicts are apparently reflected in the intimate relationships of the Chinese people, whose social patterns of behavior are under the dual impacts of both traditional and contemporary Chinese cultural values.

■ Cultural Construction of Intimate Relationships in China

As the most important intimate relationships for everybody, friendships and romantic relationships are framed by social and cultural conventions. Researchers have discovered that cultural values exert profound influences on how people think, feel, and behave in intimate relationships. According to Hofstede (1993), cultural patterns of behavior within a group of people can serve as a cognitive guide or blueprint for future actions in building or maintaining interpersonal relationships. Cultural patterns of behavior are determined by cultural values situated at the core of a culture (Hofstede, 1993). Thus, cultural values, which are invisible, untouchable, and usually taken for granted, shape what people say and do on a daily basis. Since there exist substantial differences in the Chinese and American cultural values, it is advisable to interpret the intimate relationships in China by taking into consideration the Chinese cultural values and various cultural contexts.

Cultural Conception of Friendship

Friendship is a universally recognized human need in every society. Yet, friendships in China are generally based more on mutual need than on sincere and simple friendships. That is why one of the five Confucian cardinal relationships explicitly emphasizes the relationship between friends, which is usually established on equal footing and in times of need. Just as the Chinese saying goes, "At home, one turns to his or her parents for help; outside, one seeks help from friends."

All Chinese people live in a web of interpersonal relationships woven around the family. The Chinese familial network is not merely a kinship-based one that works only in a unidirectional way; rather, it can be

extended outward many directions through a loosely defined quasi-kinship system. According to Confucius, all types of people such as colleagues, classmates, church members, and playmates can be included into this web and treated as extended members of the family. Once the friendship relationship is established between one family member and another person outside the family, it can be transferred to other family members as well (cited in Yan, 1998). What is probably a distinctive characteristic of Chinese friendship is that its nature is always couched in kinship terms. That is, relations among friends are constructed along the pattern of elder and younger siblings, which means friends treat each other as brothers or sisters. To better understand the Chinese cultural concepts toward friendship, it is essential to understand three significant Chinese concepts of *renqing* (人情; human sentiment), *guanxi* (关系; social network), and *mianzi* (面子; face).

Renqing, Guanxi, and Mianzi

Renqing, *guanxi*, and *mianzi* are indigenous concepts and fundamental sociocultural factors in the Chinese culture, which are closely related to the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism, and are embedded in every aspect of the Chinese social life (Chow & Ng, 2004). These are the critical instruments for communication, negotiation, and social interaction in the Chinese context.

There is no equivalent single word in English that can conveniently translate these concepts. The closest translation of *renqing* in English is human sentiment. *Guanxi* refers to "a relationship" between two or more individuals or social network that is implicitly based on reciprocity and mutual interest (Yang, 1994). *Mianzi* literally means face. In the Chinese culture, *renqing* coupled with *bao* (报; reciprocity) is used to manage different types of interpersonal transactions. A person who understands *renqing* knows how to reciprocate (*bao*). Usually, the receiver of *renqing* will not reject the provider's requests because a person who is indebted to *renqing* is expected to pay back. A well-known Chinese saying, "You honor me a plum, and I will in return honor you a peach," attests to this principle of reciprocity. To illustrate, if one were given a favor or a gift, one would immediately be in a double-bind situation: rejecting it would be rude and disruptive to the harmony of the relationship; accepting it, however, would put one in a "yes" only condition, that is, unable to decline any request for a favor. Also, if one fails to reciprocate, one is perceived as heartless.

Renqing is closely related to *guanxi* and *mianzi*. Actually, another word for *renqing* could be favor which is an important element in maintaining *guanxi* in the Chinese society. When one has received a favor from someone, he or she is expected to return the favor to the other person in due time. If not, it could mean you are not giving *mianzi* to that person and hence affect the *guanxi* between you. Moreover, *renqing* can be accomplished through an intermediary who feels obligated to the help seeker and who is able to motivate the help provider. In other words, *renqing* can be expressed and exercised through a particular kind of social exchange relationship, *guanxi*. It is not difficult for someone who has had first-hand experience of Chinese society to note that the Chinese people are extremely sensitive to *guanxi* and make deliberate efforts to establish and maintain it.

Since social interactions in the Chinese culture involve dynamic relationships, *guanxi* or friendship-support relationships are becoming increasingly complex, which are expanding day by day, throughout the lives of all the Chinese. According to Lee (2006), the Chinese form rich, life-long networks of mutual relations, usually involving reciprocal obligations similar to the Confucian rules. For the Chinese, personal relationships often take a long time to develop; therefore, as long as the relationships have been developed, they tend to stay very solid. To the Chinese, it is essential to create links between people and have a mutually dependent relationship in their daily life, which has been defined as "*la guanxi*" (拉关系; establishing connections). To this end, the Chinese may use some strategies such as showing care, giving a gift, or offering a hand (Hwang, 2011). In contrast to the social patterns in Western societies, especially the United States, these relationships persist long after the relationship networks dissolve. Although Americans also have the notion of "networking," the networks involve much fewer obligations than those within "*guanxi*." Within the networks of Americans, people are not expected to provide assistance in a wide range of aspects of life as in *guanxi*; they are expected to take care of themselves (Bond & Hwang, 1986).

The exchange of *guanxi* is mutual but not necessarily symmetrical. In other words, the availability and use of *guanxi* are not equal. The use of social relationships among the Chinese has become part of a cultural art form that requires a certain kind of nurturing process (Yang, 1994). Help seekers and help providers need to have the skills to observe the reciprocity in a delicate and unspecified manner. One of the important criteria is *mianzi* because the degree of preservation and enhancement of *mianzi* will influence people's management of *guanxi*.

According to Gao (1998), Ting-Toomey (2005), and Chang and Holt (1991), people in individualistic (Western) and collectivistic (Eastern) cultures assign different meanings to the content notions of face. Individualistic societies tend to emphasize non-imposition by others and self-presentational facework competence. In contrast, collectivistic cultures (Eastern) tend to emphasize non-imposition of self on others, inclusion of others, and other-directed facework competence. In individualistic cultures, face is mostly associated with self-worth, self-presentation, and self-value, whereas in collectivistic cultures face is concerned more about what others think of one's worth. That is, in many collectivistic cultures such as China and Japan, face is a primary concern in social interaction (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Originally, the concept of the Chinese face consists of two types: *lian* (脸; face) and *mianzi*. According to Chang and Holt (1991), *lian* refers to the moral character of an individual and is a behavioral standard while *mianzi* indicates social status achieved through successes in life. The bigger social success one achieves, the bigger *mianzi* he or she has. In the Chinese culture, one's concern for *mianzi* is not only personally based but also collectively based. As Sueda (1995) pointed out, face in the Chinese society is more a concern to the family than to the person and is a national character, national spirit, and even an honor and dignity. Face-losing and face-gaining acts reflect both on individual persons themselves and on their families which directly influence individuals' daily communication, political involvement, and economic activity (Chang & Holt, 1991). Therefore, one's failure threatens the face of the family, whereas one's accomplishment gains face for the family. Oftentimes, some Chinese may even use face as social capital to ask for favors.

Cultural Construction of Friendship

For most Chinese people, friends are those who can keep company or accompany one another through thick and thin. As friends, people should pay more attention to spiritual togetherness and emotional exchange rather than material things. In addition, friends may show their closeness by physical intimacy as well as spiritual intimacy. When two friends are spiritually intimate, physical distance may mean nothing. Because Chinese people would like to take a long time to build intimate and deep relationships with their in-group members, they tend to have more acquaintances, but fewer friends; yet once they become friends, the friendship will continue even for

a lifetime. Therefore, the following expectations are generally held high in the construction of Chinese friendships.

Moral enrichment. Confucius emphasizes that one should associate with friends who are better than oneself for moral enrichment. According to Confucius, there are three types of good friends: one that is direct and honest with you when he/she thinks you are wrong; one that is trustworthy, dependable, and generous when you need help; and one that is knowledgeable and talented to guide you and show you what you cannot see through (*The Analects*, 1998). All this grows out of the Confucian tendency to conceive relationships in the hierarchically structured Chinese society and Confucian belief that people tend to be improved by associating with morally exemplary individuals.

Duties and responsibilities. For the Chinese people, friendship is more about duties and responsibilities, rather than similar or same interests. Thus, many Chinese take it for granted to offer help to their friends, even at financial losses and at the risk of losing their lives in some extreme cases. They often determine who will be their true friends when they need help badly. True friends are always ready to help them out without any hesitation. In return, they will do the same when their friends need assistance.

Honesty, loyalty, and trust. For many Chinese people, friends should be honest and loyal to one another under any circumstances. Sometimes, they offer immediate help without even asking whether or not their friends are right. This happens especially among those very close friends who have sworn oaths of mock-siblinghood, converting themselves from friends to sworn siblings to reach higher levels of loyalty.

Family connections. Due to the influences of Confucian and collectivistic cultural values, friendships develop not just among individual friends but tend to expand to reach the friends' families. Friends often influence one another significantly, and family members, especially the parents, usually have a meaningful input in the whole process of friendship construction. Hence, it is very common for Chinese friends to go to each other's home, meet with their parents, relatives, and other family members.

Development and Maintenance of Friendships

Friendships are fundamental in everyone's life, particularly for the Chinese. Since most Chinese people desire to have long-term, stable, and satisfying friendships, developing and maintaining friendships with others become

indispensable. Accordingly, Spitzberg and Cupach (2002) explained that interpersonal skills and social interactions are crucial for the maturity of any social relationships just as they are important to any person's well-being and happiness. In addition, relational development and maintenance rely on relational stability, satisfaction, and such essential characteristics as commitment and involvement (Dindia & Canary, 1993). Nevertheless, behaviors and skills people tend to use to develop or maintain their friendships may be dissimilar due to their different frame of references such as cultural values and concepts.

For instance, the concept of *yuan* (缘; predestined affinity) has been developed in the Chinese culture to describe destiny or luck as conditioned by one's past or natural affinity among friends. When two Chinese people do not initiate a relationship with one another and cannot explain why, more often than not, they may simply say, "We probably did not have the *yuan*." Rather than relying on their abilities to identify causative factors in the relationship that can be "worked on" (such as communication), many Chinese are likely to accept the conditions imposed by the context, even if they do not fully understand those conditions (Chang & Holt, 1991). Consequently, quite a few would-be friends and couples fail to establish their friendships and romantic relationships.

On other occasions, people may happen to strike up an engaging conversation and find that they have common interests—perhaps in a cinema, restaurant, or at a bus stop—which makes their meeting all the more precious and the depth of their *yuan* all the more noteworthy. People affect one another in subtle and complex ways, and it is important to develop the ability to discern the nature of that influence. According to Buddhism, bad friends are those who encourage our weaknesses. A truly good friend is someone with the compassion and courage to tell us about even those things we would prefer not to hear, which we must confront if we are to develop and grow in our lives. In fact, *yuan* is a key concept in Buddhism. Due to the immense transformative powers of Buddhist practice, even "bad" friends can exert positive influences if we make our relationships with them into opportunities to examine, reform, and strengthen our lives.

In actuality, the concept of *yuan* itself is much broader and can refer to any relationship between people under any circumstance. For example, *yuan* can be thought of as the mechanism by which family members have been "placed" in each other's lives. Even two strangers sitting next to each other on a short-haul plane ride are also thought to have a certain amount

of *yuan*. There is a proverb in China, "Ten years of meditation or good deeds bring two people to cross a river in the same ferry, and a hundred years of meditation or good deeds bring two people to rest their heads on the same pillow." It conveys the same message that the two specific persons sitting in the same ferry or sleeping on the same pillow have beaten out all odds out of the six billion people living on this planet to end up in those specific situations.

Most Chinese people are very cautious before they initiate and develop a new friendship, and some may have to deal with very challenging psychological barriers at the beginning. It usually takes a considerably long period of time with frequent contacts and sufficient interactions with one another before two people finally become friends. As the saying goes, "Proof of the pudding, time will tell." In the traditional Chinese culture, friendships mean lifetime covenants among friends. Therefore, people without similar interests and personality can hardly become true friends.

Once friendship is identified, friends become interdependent. Due to the interdependent linkages, Chinese friendships reveal a very unique style. To maintain friendships, friends need to constantly interact, such as engaging in small talks and visiting each other's homes. Thus, it is very common for the Chinese people to stop by others' homes for a chat without previous appointments because friends are welcome at any time.

The reason why Chinese people are able to maintain long-term friendships is that many of them live in the same area and interact with a certain group of people for a long time. Their lives are less likely to change. Long-term relationships foster a complementary social reciprocity in which interpersonal relationships are viewed as symmetrical and reciprocal, as mentioned in the previous two sections. Therefore, the Chinese people value stable and long-term relationships and measure the depth of relationships with the length of time. They maintain the relationships in accordance with vertical social status and mutual obligations.

Friendship rituals. A series of studies have demonstrated the function of ritual practices in developing and maintaining friendships. According to Bruess and Pearson (1997), rituals are everyday interactions and behaviors with special, associated symbolic meaning for people. There are different types of friendship rituals: Social/Fellowship Rituals (Enjoyable Activities, Getting Together, Established Events, and Escape Episodes), Idiosyncratic/Symbolic Rituals (Celebration Rituals, Play Rituals, and Favorites), Communication Rituals, Share/Support/Vent Rituals, Tasks/Favors, and

Patterns/Habits/Mannerisms (Duck, Rutt, Hoy-Hurst & Strejc, 1991, p. 23). Rituals help contributing to the feasibility of relationships through special symbols that are constantly recreated through interactions (Baxter, 1988). Most importantly, "rituals provide researchers with a valuable resource for understanding the communication processes that embody relationships" (Bruess & Pearson, 1997, p. 28). Therefore, it is important to introduce the Chinese friendship rituals with a well-known story among the Chinese.

In the Chinese history, there is a famous story about the oath of the Peach Garden from *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*, which is one of the four major Chinese literary classics. At the end of the Eastern Han dynasty (25 AD–220 AD), Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei took an oath of fraternity in a ceremony in a peach garden and became sworn brothers from then on. Their goal in taking the oath was to protect the Han Empire. The oath bound the three men, who would later play imperative roles in the establishment of the state of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms (220 AD–280 AD). The ritual is also often alluded to as a symbol of fraternal loyalty. As sworn brothers, they took the oath by saying, "Although we were not born on the same day in the same month and same year, we would rather die on the same day," which inspired generations of followers throughout the Chinese history.

As the three sworn brothers did, it is common even today to conduct a friendship ritual among the Chinese, especially males, to demonstrate one's relationship with another friend as genuine brothers with different surnames. This is a ceremony or action that bonds the friendship and shows commitment to retaining the friendship. Such practice provides friends with a notion of shared experiences, explicit intimacy, and pseudo-kinship bonds (Oring, 1984).

Challenges of intercultural friendships. Although intercultural friendships can benefit our lives in a wide variety of ways, there are many negative stereotypes associated with this type of relationship. Gaines and Liu (2000) have argued that the reason why an intercultural relationship is more likely to be vulnerable is because the dyad's relational identity is not well developed, resulting in the relationship being influenced by self-serving biases and group-serving biases. Relational identity (also termed "relational culture" or "third culture") is an abstract concept that might best be defined as a reality or culture that reflects the values, the rules, and the processes of the friendship and helps the dyad to maintain its relational distinctiveness (Casmir, 1993; Wood, 2000). Just as the culture of a

particular country influences the definition and enactment of appropriate behavior within that country, relational identity guides behavior within a relationship. According to Gaines and Liu, if the dyad's relational identity is strong, the relationship tends to last longer. In this sense, relational identity is a critical component in determining the success of an intercultural friendship. Unfortunately, researchers have paid scant attention to the development of relational identity by members in intercultural friendships (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). While Identity Management Theory (IMT) and Third-Culture Building Model were developed in an effort to describe the phases of relational identity construction between members of intercultural relationships, as Gudykunst (2002) noted, very little research has sought to further explore these two theories.

Huang (2008) made a contrastive analysis of the different friendship views between the Chinese and the Americans and noted that friends in China are more familiar with one another in terms of family background, educational background, interests, and even private life than friends in the United States. Scholars have found that members involved in intercultural friendships have to deal with not only the challenges that exist with intracultural friendships (e.g., values, interests, personality traits, and changes) but also the problems emerging from internal and external relational dialectics, cultural differences, and possible language barriers between the interactants (Chen, 2002; Gareis, 1995; Javidi & Javidi, 1991; Martin & Nakayama, 1997). Clearly, positive facilitation of intercultural friendships requires more than simply increasing the possibilities for contact or interaction.

Fortunately, research has indicated that stereotypes, dissimilarities, and insufficient cultural understandings in a relationship can be constructively addressed through communicative activities, such as value sharing and culture learning (Monsour, 1994). Even though intercultural friendships might seem difficult or anxiety provoking in the beginning stages, little research suggests that intercultural relationships fail more easily than intracultural relationships. In effect, if the dyad knows how to patiently embrace differences and identify their shared similarities, intercultural friendships can be as strong and last as long as intracultural friendships (Gaines & Agnew, 2003).

As for the cultural differences in friendships, since collectivists tend to display a high-context communication style, they are more concerned with avoiding hurting others and are likely to end up being seen by others as indirect, vague, and evasive. On the other hand, individualists are more

likely to be concerned with clarity of messages and tend to be perceived as direct, open, and expressive of their opinions consistent with feelings (Kim, 1994). Individualists typically view direct requests and outspokenness as the most effective strategy for gaining compliance, whereas people from collectivist cultures are more likely to perceive the same behaviors generally as the least effective interpersonal strategies (Kim & Wilson, 1994).

In contrast with individualists, collectivists tend to be more sensitive to social evaluation by their significant others and, therefore, try to maintain a positive evaluation by their partners so as to maintain harmony within a relationship (Goodwin, 1999). For collectivists, dyadic needs or affiliate and nurturing needs are likely to play a larger part than individual needs (Hui & Villareal, 1989), and this likelihood is displayed in their relationship behaviors. They tend to view relationships to be cherished and tolerated at all costs as manifested in costly accommodations (Chang & Holt, 1991).

Cultural Conception of Romantic Relationships

As Jankowiak (1993) observed, "romantic passion is a complex, multifaceted emotional phenomenon that is a byproduct of an interplay between biology, self, and society" (p. 4). Romantic relationship is a much more complex relationship when cultural differences are involved. Culture affects our capacity to love and to maintain romantic relationships. According to Chao and Tian (2009), from the Western perspective, love is about a person's private wishes and desires, yet Chinese people tend to praise the kind of love, with emotional restraint, cautious behavior, and the goal of marital harmony. Since the United States and China differ greatly in normative cultural values and formative historical events, it is expected that significant differences exist in the social norms and patterns of romantic behaviors in the two countries.

Excessive love/arranged marriage/conserved love in China. Traditionally, love was considered trivial, even a dangerous thing in the Chinese culture. In a patriarchal society with Confucianism as the dominant ideology for thousands of years, the central role of women is caring for the family at home. Women as lovers or romantic objects were another matter, something to either ignore or beware of (Hsieh, 2008). In addition, romantic love was linked to desire, emotions, and passion. Love was understood mainly as referring to the natural emotional and sexual feelings between

a male and a female. Excessive love, even between husband and wife, was normally seen as unbecoming and blind infatuation.

Therefore, arranged marriage was a normal way to maintain family social class and economic wealth in China due to the influence of the collectivistic cultural values. Traditionally, sons and daughters of a Chinese family were seen as a kind of commodity to be "exchanged" for greater social and economic benefits for their families. Loyalty, especially to the wider kin group and extended family, dictated decisions people made about entering marriage and whom they shall marry, and individual's preference was not at all important (Strong & Cohen, 2013). It was women's responsibility to subordinate for the sake of their families, and love and passion were considered negative and unrealistic. Although arranged marriages have been almost extinct in contemporary China, many marriage decisions such as partner choice are still strongly influenced by parents and relatives (Pimentel, 2000).

In a collectivistic culture like China, passionate love and marriage based on romantic love are seen negatively as potential threats to the family and are thought to interfere with family closeness and kin obligations (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Therefore, companionate love tends to be developed and supported in Chinese romantic relationships. Hatfield and Rapson (1993) proposed the concept *companionate love*, which means a kind of emotional relationship where passion is no longer present, but where a deep affection and commitment remain (as cited in Kim & Hatfield, 2004). That is to say, companionate love emphasizes the importance of shared values, commitment, intimacy, and trust. Pimentel (2000) noted, companionate love and romantic love are different systems. Since arranged marriages tend to "start out cold," they can only get "hotter" (p. 34). On the contrary, the romantic and passionate love starts from a high degree but has nowhere to go but down.

Due to the influence of Confucianism on the traditional Chinese culture, expressions of emotion and love are very subtle for the Chinese people. The Chinese society is far more reserved than the Western society when it comes to demonstrating "love" such as kissing, hugging, and saying "I love you." As mentioned before, *li* (禮; propriety) is one of the original elements of Confucianism, which makes the Chinese people restrain their emotional expressions. Even today, many Chinese people are still affected by the traditional concepts of love. Most Chinese people, especially Chinese men, still think that it is a great shame to openly show their love to their lovers, especially in front of the public.

Although China has increasingly adopted Western ways of life, the traditional family structure is still highly valued and holds a prominent position in the Chinese culture. Both traditional and modern Chinese families have similar values and morals, and these have been an important part of daily life for many centuries. Love for Chinese people is about balancing personal feelings with public and family expectations, and it is mostly companionate love, which is somewhat stronger than friendship because of the element of long-term commitment.

As Ashford (2009) noted, "companionate love is observed in long-term marriages where passion is no longer present, but where a deep affection and commitment remain" (p. 498). In this type of love, each knows he or she can count on the other, and the excitement comes from other things such as work and children. Since it may become routine and dutiful, maintaining romance within the context of companionate love becomes the challenge of an enduring relationship (Strong, DeVault, Suid & Reynolds, 1983).

In the Chinese culture, the most important criterion for pursuing love interest or a romantic partner is who is well matched in social and economic status. The Chinese tend to think that only couples from similar classes or family backgrounds can be loyal to each other, honor their elders, and maintain family harmony. In the traditional Chinese society, parents paid much attention to finding the perfect match for their children and to safeguarding the reputation and interest of the family. Today, although there are some differences in spousal selection standards among the young Chinese generations, the family perspectives and societal requirements toward their marriage partners are still crucial for them. Their thoughts and behaviors are continuously affected by the traditional Chinese cultural values, and they still consider factors such as economic condition, family background, and education level. It is clear that the notion of companionate love has been more valued than romantic love in China.

Practical marriage and social pressure. Traditionally, the Chinese did not develop a romantic relationship before marriage. Instead, they endorsed the love of *yuan* and believed that their marriage was based on fated and predestined love, which could be cultivated gradually after getting married. However, according to Chao and Tian (2009), most young Chinese now have supported practical and romantic relationships and felt that dating is a prestage of marriage that provides a way for people to get to know the other person better. Meanwhile, many young Chinese also tend to emphasize the practical needs for marriage, which include parental

approval, responsibility, and the importance of appropriate behavior before marriage. In addition, since numerous Chinese people still view marriage as being realistic and practical, when a man is introduced to a girl, it is very possible that the first question the girl, or more likely the girls' parents, may ask is whether or not the male partner has a house. It might be somewhat exaggerated, but it does happen in modern China where material affluence has received top attention in marriage.

Furthermore, Confucianism stresses patriarchy, hierarchy, and subordination, and individuals, therefore, should be subject to the overall needs of family and society. When a Chinese person chooses celibacy or has not gotten married at a certain age, people around him or her will try to figure out the reason and give him or her much pressure due to the influence of Confucianism.

Cultural Construction of Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships exist in all cultures, and many people assume that there are, if not the same, at least similar ways of establishing romantic relationships, showing passion, and shouldering responsibilities in all cultures. The truth is that different cultures exert impacts upon romantic relationships differently. Therefore, it requires a detailed understanding of the cultural elements in the conception and construction of romantic relationships in the Chinese society.

The notion of dating. Since most Chinese are living in a collectivistic culture, they often initiate a date with more caution than the people in an individualist culture. They tend not to initiate invitations unless they have consulted with their in-group members or they feel confident about the result of the relationship while individualists are less likely to consult their family or friends before initiating a date. Strongly influenced by the Confucian ideas, many Chinese women tend to be dependent on their male partners to initiate a date, pay for the dating expenses, and initiate sexual behavior.

The development of romantic relationships is affected by dating scripts. According to Duck, West, and Acitelli (1997), "dating scripts" or "sexual scripts" have been used to refer to a set of behavioral rules and orders that individuals follow when they are involved in dating situations. Dating scripts, like other types of interaction scripts, are acquired through one's social experience and interaction. An individual constructs his or her

scripts either based on previous personal experience or observations of others' behaviors in similar situations. Hence, it is quite natural to understand that scripts "occur in context and reflect the customs and values of both society and subculture in which they occur" (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2000, p. 24). Chao and Tian (2009) identified the sequences of the Chinese dating behaviors for a first date: A meal (lunch or dinner) and an activity such as a movie, sporting event, bowling, dancing, and having a drink, which allows dating partners to converse and learn about each other. However, neither person is pressed to talk endlessly due to the activity which takes some of the pressure off a first date. Furthermore, some Chinese people would like to go out as a group including other couples to ease the tension/pressure of a first date.

In addition, cultures influence and shape people's dating attitudes and behaviors. As Whyte (1992) observed, although dating is still based on the idea that it provides valuable experience that will help individuals select mates, dating in the United States today is far removed from mate selection and focuses more on enjoyment or pleasure. In contrast, in the Chinese culture, dating is a preface to marriage, a way by which a suitable marital partner can be found. Moreover, because of China's rigorous and competitive college entrance examinations, high school students simply have too much work to do. Therefore, compared with the American counterparts, teenagers in China have less romantic experience before they leave high school (Chao & Tian, 2009). Actually, many young people in China start their serious dating after finishing their secondary education.

In contemporary China, a new kind of dating arranged by parents is becoming popular. Parents are known to be more resourceful and experienced and are seen as individuals with better capabilities of evaluating the quality of marriage (Huang, Jin, & Xu, 2012). Moreover, Chinese parents in general are expected to be more involved in their children's romantic relationships. It is common for parents and grandparents to set their children up on dating with suitable matches they have found. If their children's dating partners cannot get approval from them, it is difficult for their children to continue with the dating relationship.

Blind date. *Xiang qin* (相亲; blind date) is a kind of meeting between a man and a woman for the purpose of determining marriage. Instead of a dinner and a movie for discovering mutual interests, a blind date is a fact-finding mission to see if the other party fulfills one's expectations of what an ideal spouse should be. There are three reasons why blind date is

very popular in contemporary China: personal fear of their age; inevitability of marriage; the need of family life. With these three concepts, people begin a linear type of life: adulthood, marriage, children, and parenting at a certain age with generation after generation repeating the cycle, to continue family heritage. Individual values are not important in this process. Everyone should subordinate and even sacrifice his/her own interests for the family interests.

Sex before marriage. In general, sex before marriage in China is less common and taken more seriously than it is in many individualist cultures. Attitudes toward sex are changing, especially in the more cosmopolitan cities like Beijing and Shanghai, but in general many Chinese women see sex as a sign that a relationship is headed toward marriage and many Chinese men say they would prefer to marry a woman who has not had premarital sex. Most Chinese people have the belief that men are more sexually active than women, who are believed to have less strong desires. Women are thus expected to remain virgins. Men who live by this standard want to marry "nice" girls who have not had sex before marriage. However, Reiss (1967) identified a transitional standard, which still applies today: if the woman is in love or engaged, then sex is permissible. In this context, love is the critical factor determining whether or not a woman may engage in premarital intercourse; however, it is not a critical factor for men (Strong, DeVault, Suid, & Reynolds, 1983). It is also found that more and more Chinese people tend to permit or accept the premarital sex experience of their romantic partners because cohabitation among college students and other young people are not uncommon in present-day China. The phenomenon results partially from the ideological emancipation of the Chinese young people under the impacts of globalization and partially from the shortage of housing for dating including even married couples (Chao & Tian, 2009).

■ The Development and Maintenance of Romantic Relationships

Relational maintenance may be seen as a goal for people; that is, most people desire for long-term, stable, and satisfying relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1994). A workable relationship requires the recognition and adjustment of each person's expectations of the other and of the relationship. Researchers have examined various forms of intimate behavior and expressions of

love. For instance, Hofstede (1980) confirmed the cross-cultural differences in the expression of love under individualistic and collectivistic contexts. Klein, Horton, and Zhang (2008) found that the most common expression of love is to communicate, to have dinner together, and to engage in physical intimacy for college students both in the United States and East Asia. In contrast, American college students are more likely than East Asian students to show their care for one another and to express love for their partners.

Regarding the commitment to romantic relationship, Hsu (1985) suggested that the Chinese people treat romantic relationships or dating relationships more seriously than Americans. In China, a romantic relationship is often perceived as one step before marriage and contains long-term commitment. While in the United States, a committed relationship is based on strong emotion (Dion & Dion, 1988). Gao (2001) also found that while more passion was found in American couples than their Chinese counterparts, both US and Chinese romantic couples reveal the same tendency of increasing their commitment in their intimate relationships when their romantic relationships became more serious. To most Chinese people, commitment is a practical approach to maintaining romantic relationships. It also reflects obligations or responsibilities of a person involved in the relationship, whereas many Americans are more likely to focus on the emotional aspects of a romantic relationship.

■ Conclusion

Culture is learned and socially shared, and it influences all aspects of an individual's life. These various influences can create challenges in intimate relationships with a person from a different cultural background. Although intercultural relationships share some similarities, they have some unique characteristics that can guide our thinking about communicating in these relationships. By examining Eastern notions of friendships and romantic relationships, readers in the West can broaden their global perspectives, increase their cultural awareness, and become more interculturally ready to communicate with people from the East. Ideally, learning to understand different perspectives toward interpersonal relationships can not only help us to generate more helpful interpersonal strategies to cope with the cross-cultural differences but also facilitate our efforts building a more harmonious multicultural community.

To this end, this chapter has presented a brief introduction to the impacts of globalization on human relationships and cultural conceptions

of intimate relationships, with a focus on friendships and romantic relationships. Globalization does shorten the physical and conceptual distances between the East and West, but the deep-rooted Chinese cultural values such as *renqing*, *guanxi*, *mianzi*, *bao*, and *yuan* still shape how the Chinese perceive and behave toward friendships and romantic relationships. To reveal how exactly the Chinese cultural values are communicated in the process of establishing friendships and romantic relationships in China, the chapter has provided a clear-cut, detailed, and meaningful discussion about the cultural conception, cultural construction, development and maintenance of friendships and romantic relationships in China. In addition, the chapter makes consistent conceptual and practical comparisons and contrasts between China and the United States in regard to the cultural construction of friendships and romantic love.

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