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Title	Culture, Context, and Concerns about Face: Synergistic Insights from Pragmatics and Social Psychology
Type	Article
URL	https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/28685/
DOI	##doi##
Date	2019
Citation	Spencer-Oatey, Helen and Wang, Jiayi orcid iconORCID: 0000-0003-2720-8218 (2019) Culture, Context, and Concerns about Face: Synergistic Insights from Pragmatics and Social Psychology. The Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 38 (4). pp. 423-440. ISSN 0261-927X
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It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. ##doi##

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Culture, Context, and Concerns about Face:
Synergistic Insights from Pragmatics and Social Psychology

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Abstract

This article explores the interconnections between culture, context, and language, with a special focus on face. Research into face has taken place in various fields and here we draw on insights from different disciplinary perspectives, notably linguistics and social psychology, to address the following questions: (1) To what extent can the various categorizations of face be linked with people's individual-level values? (2) How do culture-level values interplay with context and language in affecting face sensitivities? The data for our study involved interactions between government officials during a Chinese delegation visit to the USA in which face concerns were prominent. Mixed support is found for existing theorizing and the paper ends by calling for more interdisciplinary research to help unpack the complex mix of interconnected factors.

Keywords

Face; relations; personal values; context; interpreting; intercultural interaction; professional communication.

Introduction

Face is a topic of interest to researchers in several fields, including communication studies, social psychology, and pragmatics. In this article, we draw on insights from these different disciplinary perspectives to address the following questions: (1) To what extent can the various categorizations of face be linked with people's individual-level values and act as motivation bases? (2) How do culture-level values interact with context and language in affecting face sensitivities? We start by outlining the various configurations of face proposed by different researchers and then consider whether they can be explained by underlying motivational values. For this, we draw on the social psychologist, Shalom Schwartz's (1992) framework of individual-level values and consider how well the different types of face can be mapped onto the values in his framework. In relation to the second, Ting-Toomey (2005, 2017) has argued that members of individualist cultures put more emphasis on self-face than members of collectivist cultures while collectivists emphasize other-face and mutual-face maintenance, but she also points to the influence of individual, relational, and situational factors. In this paper we examine these claims through the analysis of authentic case study data in which Chinese officials discuss their face concerns in interactions with American counterpart officials during a delegation visit to the USA. Our aim, in line with the goals of this journal, is to transcend disciplinary, methodological and national boundaries by applying a social psychological framework (Schwartz's individual-level continuum of values) to multidisciplinary conceptualizations of face types, and then to use authentic, contextualized discourse data to explore the potential impact of cultural factors on the face and inter-group concerns that emerge.

Literature review

Conceptualizations of face and face needs

Face has been identified as crucial to interaction (e.g. Goffman, 1967), so it is important to understand the various facets of face and what (if any) are their underlying motivational bases. Broadly speaking, face can be regarded as the way in which "we want others to see us and treat us

and how we actually treat others in association with their social self-conception expectations" (Ting-Toomey, 2017, p. 1). As this implies, face involves both self and other, and self and other's behavior. Moreover, people's face is emotionally sensitive or vulnerable and can be threatened, undermined, and enhanced. Spencer-Oatey (2007, p. 644) explains this as follows:

> [Face] is associated with positively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly), and with negatively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others NOT to ascribe to him/her. … face threat/loss/gain will only be perceived when there is a mismatch between an attribute claimed (or denied, in the case of negatively-evaluated traits) and an attribute perceived as being ascribed by others.

One important issue, therefore, is conceptualizing the attributes that are face-sensitive for people. Different theorists have proposed different types of face to account for this.

Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), in their influential face model of politeness, draw a twofold distinction. They argue that people all over the world have two fundamental face needs: the desire to be independent and not imposed upon, which they label 'negative face' and the desire to be appreciated and valued positively, which they label 'positive face'. They claim that these two face needs are universal. However, a number of Japanese linguists (e.g. Matsumoto, 1988) have been particularly critical of this conceptualization. For instance, Matsumoto has argued that the concepts of positive and negative face are both associated with individual concerns, and that Brown and Levinson have overlooked the societal aspect of face. Other scholars have argued similarly, including Spencer-Oatey (2000) and Bravo (2008), who refer to independent/interdependent face and autonomy/affiliation face respectively.

Researchers (mostly from the field of communication studies) have identified yet other types of face. For example, Lim (1994) has proposed a three-fold conceptualization: autonomy face (the claim for independence), fellowship face (the claim to be regarded as a worthy friend/colleague), and competence face (the claim to be regarded as capable and successful). Even more differentiated, Ting-Toomey (2005) has identified a five-fold conceptualization: autonomy face (people's need for independence and non-imposition), status face (people's need to be recognized as having reputation and power), competence face (people's need for their personal qualities and abilities to be appreciated), inclusion/fellowship face (people's need for appreciation as worthy companions), reliability face (people's need to be acknowledged as dependable and trustworthy), and moral face (people's need for their sense of dignity, honor and propriety to be respected).

Ho (1994) maintains that "the criteria by which a person's face is judged are rooted in cultural values, and hence are culture specific" (p.275). This raises two questions: (1) to what extent can types of face concern be linked with personal values which act as motivational bases, and (2) to what extent does this mean that face concerns differ across cultural groups?

To explore the first question, we need a conceptualization of cultural values that operate at the individual level (rather than at the group level) and Schwartz's continuum of individual-level values (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2012) is thus particularly suitable because of its ability to offer this. Schwartz, in addition to proposing a motivational continuum of values, identifies some superordinate contrasts, two of which are personal focus and social focus. He explains that these relate to the fundamental human need to coordinate social interaction by managing the needs of the individual (individual person or singular group) in relation to those of the group (group members or multiple groups). This dialectic contrast (personal focus–social focus) corresponds to the dual face distinctions made by Spencer-Oatey (2000) and Bravo (2008) and thus is supportive of those conceptualizations. It also

makes clear why Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) concepts of positive and negative face have been regarded as insufficiently universal, because the social focus is not included, as argued by Matsumoto (1988) and others.

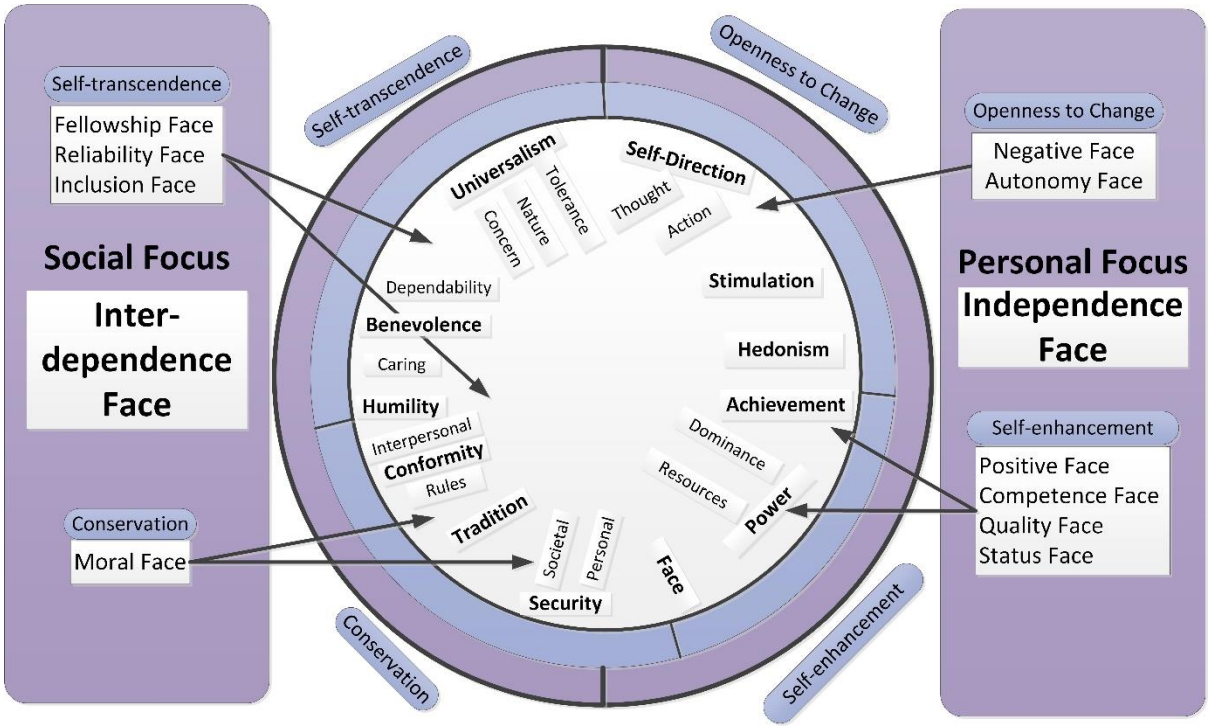


Figure 1. A spatial mapping of conceptualizations of types of face onto Schwartz's continuum of values

Within each of these personal and social foci, Schwartz proposes a further division, with a personal focus comprising openness to change and self-enhancement, and with a social focus comprising conservation and self-transcendence. These elements form another two dialectic pairs, openness to change–conservation and self-enhancement–self-transcendence. All of these layers are illustrated in in Figure 1.[1]

If we now compare the various conceptualizations of face discussed above with Schwartz's conceptualization of values, we can note many areas of correspondence. For example, Schwartz's concept of self-direction (in thought and action) relates to the notions of negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) and autonomy face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005); his concept of self-enhancement (achievement, power) relates to the notions of positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987), competence face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005), quality face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), and status face (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Further correspondences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. A mapping of conceptualizations of types of face onto Schwartz's continuum of values

Personal Focus		**Social Focus**	
Openness to change	**Self-enhancement**	**Self-transcendence**	**Conservation**
(Self-direction, Stimulation)	(Achievement, Power, Image)	(Universalism, Benevolence, Humility)	(Conformity, Tradition)
• Negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) • Autonomy face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) • Competence face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005) • Quality face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) • Status face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Fellowship face (Lim, 1994) • Inclusion face (Ting-Toomey, 2005) • Reliability face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Moral face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)

So, in terms of Ho's (1994, p. 275) argument that face claims are rooted in values, Schwartz's (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2012) conceptualization of personal values and the mappings identified above offer clear support for the argument that values act as motivational bases for face needs .

However, this still leaves a second question unanswered: how culture affects people's face needs, orientations and sensitivities. We turn to this next.

Culture and face needs/sensitivities

Within pragmatics, there has been relatively little unpacking of culture as an explanatory variable of face needs/sensitivities (Bond, Žegarac, & Spencer-Oatey, 2000), beyond the kinds of debates on types of face reported in the previous section. In contrast, much greater attention has been paid to this in communication studies. For example, Ting-Toomey (2005, 2017) proposes a number of core assumptions that relate to the interconnections between culture and face, including the following:

(a) people in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations;

(b) cultural individualism–collectivism (I-C) value patterns shape members' preferences for self-oriented face concern versus other-oriented or mutual-oriented concern;

(c) small and large power distance value patterns shape members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework;

(d) the value dimensions, in conjunction with individual, relational, and situational factors, influence the use of particular facework behaviors in particular cultural scenes.

As can be seen, Ting-Toomey argues that while face is a universal need and concern, two fundamental culture-level values, cultural I-C and small/large power distance, have a particular influence on the nature of those concerns and how they are managed. She maintains that individualists tend to prioritize self-face needs while collectivists tend to orient towards other- and mutual-face needs, and that people who hold small power distance values tend to minimize status

differences in interaction, while the converse is the case for those who hold high power distance values.

Ting-Toomey also points to the importance of individual, relational, and situational factors. In a recent update of her conflict model, she and Oetzel (2013) unpack this in more detail. They attach particular importance to identifying different levels of cultural influence: macro (larger sociocultural contexts, histories, worldviews, beliefs, values and ideologies), exo (larger, formal institutions such as government agencies and systems), meso (units of immediate influence such as workplace settings), and micro (dynamic constructions and interpretations of interactions).

In terms of future research directions, Ting-Toomey (2017) maintains that it is vital to instill "a strong sense of situational complexity and social identity complexity" (p.4) in further theorizing face management. At the meso and micro levels, this is an area where pragmatics/sociolinguistics can make a significant contribution, because the role of context at these levels has always been central to analysis. While many linguists have put forward frameworks, Allwood (2000) is one of the few to draw a clear conceptual distinction between the meso and micro levels. Taking an 'activity based approach' to communication, he argues that 'communicative activity' (at the meso level) and 'communication contributions' (at the micro level) both need to be analysed. He maintains that meso level communicative activities can be characterized by four parameters, as shown in Table 2. These provide a clear framework for analytic purposes allowing possible cultural differences in perceptions of communicative activities to be explored systematically.

Table 2. Allwood's Communicative Activity Meso Level Contextual Parameters

Parameter	Explanation
Purpose	The purpose and function of the activity, along with the associated procedures for achieving it.
Roles	The expectations (and sometimes formal requirements) which exist concerning the rights, obligations and competence needs that are associated with a given role in an activity.
Artifacts	The instruments, tools and media used to pursue the activity.
Environment	Includes both the social environment influenced by macro and exo level factors and the physical environment with properties such as sound, temperature, furniture.

Methodology

In order to explore the interplay between face concerns and their underlying values on the one hand, and culture, context, and language on the other, we analyzed case study data from a three-week visit to the USA by a delegation of Chinese officials. Case studies can offer "a rich picture with many kinds of insights" (Thomas, 2011, p. 21) and so we decided to take the opportunity to follow the delegation. Our initial aim was simply to gather some pilot data to explore the kinds of professional issues that senior Chinese leaders experience when travelling abroad. However, the data was so rich in terms of face concerns that we decided to analyze it from that perspective.

Data collection

The delegation was made up of 20 senior Chinese officials (17 male, 3 female, with an average age of around 50 years) from a government Ministry. The second author was working for the Ministry at the time and participated as the delegation's administrator; she was also a field researcher and so

had insider status. The officials had worked with each other for a long time and knew each other well. They all had prior experience of interacting with non-Chinese professionals and had previously been abroad for work purposes. They were visiting the corresponding American government Department, with a view to establishing connections, sharing experiences and learning from each other's processes and procedures. The American hosts were located in several different cities, all belonging to various organizations associated with the corresponding US government Department. Usually there were three to seven American senior officials and 21 Chinese delegates present at the daily meetings. The meetings were mostly held in very formal meeting rooms such as board rooms at the government organizations. Only a few visits involved a site visit of the government organizations and/or government buildings where no recording devices were allowed.

Both Americans and Chinese participants gave permission for all the daytime meetings to be recorded (usually video, occasionally audio) for research purposes, and this amounted to about 20 hours of video recordings and 2 hours of audio recordings. The Americans had recruited an interpreter to interpret at all the daytime meetings and site visits. Every evening of each working day, the head of the delegation convened a group meeting to reflect on what had happened during the day and to make plans for the following day. All 20 members of the delegation, plus the administrator cum field researcher, took part in all the evening meetings. There were 12 evening meetings (EMs) altogether, averaging 20 minutes in length. The field researcher, who had been trained as an interpreter, took full records, using interpreter's shorthand. Over 50 pages of shorthand notes were transcribed and translated into a record of more than 15,000 words. This trip thus offered us a rare opportunity, with minimal researcher intervention, to examine how the Chinese participants interpreted their interactions with their American hosts because of the administrator cum researcher's insider role.

The EMs were always held in the Head of Delegation's (HoD's) hotel suite. There was no time limit or agenda and any delegate could raise any issue and make any comments they wished. When all the issues of concern had been covered, the HoD would conclude the meeting. Throughout the trip, the EMs were kept as a routine and they were viewed as the primary and most effective channel of internal communication. The delegation reached group consensus and made most of their decisions there.

It should be noted that the field researcher played a dual role throughout the trip. On the one hand, she was working as the official administrator for the delegation, responsible for the logistics of the trip, and this enabled her to attend all events as a true delegation member, accessing the delegation's spontaneous interpretations and their reactions and responses to the situations as they occurred throughout the visit. In other words, she did not need to rely on researcher-initiated interviews. On the other hand, she was a field researcher. While gathering the data, she informed the Chinese and American participants that she was doing research on intercultural communication and that the data would be used for research purposes. Permissions were then given. We do not deny that the dual roles may have had an impact. However, as explained below, our focus was on Chinese perspectives, and since the field researcher was well known to the delegation members, they treated her as a true insider, not showing any reservations over their comments. For confidentiality reasons, all the names of the delegation members, as well as their Ministry, have been anonymized.

Data analysis

In our analysis we focused on the Chinese participants' perspectives, partly because that was more feasible given the practicalities of the trip and partly because it is less common to hear Chinese

participants' voices commenting on interactions with people of other nationalities in a spontaneous 'off camera' manner. Since we wanted to focus on the issues that were important to the participants, we started by examining the EM data where the Chinese delegates spontaneously commented on the things that had happened during the day that were particularly salient to them. With the help of a corpus analysis tool, AntConc, we carried out word frequency analyses of the EM texts and, interestingly, *guanxi* (relations), *mianzi* and *lian* (face), and *xingxiang* (image) emerged among the 30 most frequent words.[2] In other words, issues of face and relations emerged as key concerns for the delegates. So we then selected for detailed analysis the incidents where face was referred to explicitly and matched these up with the sections of the video recordings where the incidents occurred. We acknowledge that the selected incidents do not necessarily represent all of the Chinese delegates' perceptions of face-sensitive experiences; moreover, we do not claim that the types of concerns would necessarily be experienced by other Chinese officials. Nevertheless, we would argue that all the incidents that emerged from the corpus analysis were salient to this delegation and in the next section we report a selection of them.[3] For discussion of additional incidents, please see Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015).

Analysis of case study data

At the very first EM, the HoD laid down some ground rules for the trip and identified face maintenance and enhancement very explicitly, as shown in extract 1:

> **Data extract 1: Explaining the ground rules (Week 1, Workday 1 EM, HoD comment)**
> 中 We are here in the US as a delegation, a collective group composed of members from various organizations or departments [under the Ministry]. This collective group has its own group *image*, that is to say the delegation's *face*. Our *image* is made of everyone's. I hope that on the current basis, we can build a better *image*. In a strict sense, the delegation's *face* is made of your *face*. If you don't pay attention to your own *face*, your personal behavior will affect our collective *image*, or even our X Ministry's *image*. We should not only increase our delegation's *face* but also our Ministry's *face* […]. Every detail has to do with our *image*. We should be responsible not only for ourselves but also for our delegation's *image*. Therefore, throughout our stay in the US, we must constantly enhance our *image*. 中

As can be seen, the HoD referred to multiple levels of face and their interconnections (individual face, and the face of both the delegation and the government Ministry they belonged to). This exhortation set the scene and comments on subsequent incidents reflect their ongoing concerns about this. For example, the next day members were upset by the strict security checks at the entrance to an American government building, when they were asked to take off their belts. On the one hand, they were embarrassed; on the other, they felt that, given their status, they should have been exempted from this and complained to each other about it in Chinese in front of their hosts. At the EM that day, the HoD reminded them of the need to remember their image.

> **Data extract 2: Instructions on how to react (Week 1, Workday 2, EM HoD comment)**
> 中 When visiting a government agency like this afternoon, we must abide by their regulations, such as removing belts and not bringing any electronic devices into the [name] government organizations. Don't feel a huge loss of *face* when being asked to remove the belts according to their requirements. Pay attention to our *image*. 中

A couple of days later the delegates found several aspects of the local interpreter's behavior face-threatening. The interpreter was Chinese but had been recruited by the American hosts. In the first incident, the interpreter asked the American speaker to speak in longer sentences so that she could interpret more easily (see Data extract 3, lines 3-5).

Data extract 3: Interpreting incident 1 (Week 1, Workday 4, video data)

1	American 1:	That process usually starts
2		[stops and looks at the interpreter for translation.]
3	Interpreter:	Could you just finish the whole sentence=
4	American 1:	=Sure.
5	Interpreter:	That is easier for me to translate.
6	American 1:	Oh absolutely. No probl-
7	Interpreter:	中 I said that she'd better not divide a sentence into several parts,
8		makes it easier for me to translate. 中
9		[American 1 blushes. The delegates do not say anything.]
10	American 1:	That process usually starts with… [continues with presentation]

In the evening, one of the delegates commented on this, arguing that the interpreter's request made the delegation lose face (see Data extract 4). Others agreed with him, saying she was very impolite to request that.

Data extract 4: Evaluation of interpreting incident 1 (Week 1, Workday 4 EM, D7)

> 中 I've noticed at a point that the interpreter interrupted the speaker and requested her to finish the whole sentence. That was extremely *face*-losing from our side as it seemed to be rashly requested by us. The speaker like all her colleagues today looked rather relaxed and tolerant but I could still see that her color of *face* changed when hearing the interpreter's forceful request, yet the interpreter is provided by the American side and we really can say nothing. 中

As the meeting proceeded, another incident occurred. After the American speaker answered a question, many of the delegates started talking among themselves (in Chinese) in a very loud, animated manner. They were talking so loudly that the interpreter could not hear the question asked by another delegate, so she raised her voice to ask them to 'be quiet' (see Data extract 5).

Data extract 5: Interpreting incident 2 (Week 1, Workday 5, video data)

1	D10:	[Asks a question but the interpreter can't hear it clearly]
2	Interpreter:	中 (Everyone) speaking so loudly I can't hear your question 中
3		[Smiling while looking around the room, American 1 seems
4		confused about what is going on.]
5	Interpreter:	中 BE QUIET! 中
6		[Interpreter shouts to the whole room.]
7		[The delegates become quiet immediately, and the speaker smiles
8		embarrassingly.]
9	D10:	中 Are they responsible …? 中

Later that day, at the end of a talk given by American 3, which Americans 1 and 2 also attended, the HoD thanked American 3 for his talk. The interpreter then gave a much longer interpretation, explaining what had happened earlier in the day at American 1's talk – that it was a reflection of

their level of interest (Data extract 6, lines 4-9). She then told the delegates (most of) what she had said to the Americans (lines 14-18).

Data extract 6: Interpreting incident 3 (Week 1, Workday 4, video data)

1	HoD:	中 Many thanks [American 3] for helping us understand the
2		overall situation. 中
3	Interpreter:	Thank you very much for your wonderful introduction. You just
4		gave them numerous useful information. They are very very
5		interested. That's the reason why they had very enthusiastic
6		and passionate discussion. They hope you can FORGIVE our
7		discussion. Of course, we respect you very much. Just
8		BECAUSE of your wonderful lecture, we had such an
9		enthusiastic discussion. Thank you very much.
10	American 3:	You are very kind. ((bows his head to the Chinese leader.))
11		[Americans 1 and 2 nod their heads.]
12	Interpreter:	中 Yes, she said you were excellent. 中
13		[All the delegates applaud.]
14	Interpreter:	中 Yes, just now I translated for her what you were saying. (I)
15		said that it was just because her talk was so good that you
16		talked about it so heatedly. It was definitely not showing any
17		disrespect towards you. We respect you very much. We like
18		you very much. 中
19	HoD:	中 uh uh 中

In the evening meeting, the interpreter's behavior provoked a number of comments, including those shown in Data extract 7.

Data extract 7: Evaluation of Interpreting Incidents 2 & 3 (Week 1, Workday 4 EM)

DHoD[4]: 中 But she interrupted us several times today in front of the Americans. She was transcending her power. I didn't understand and still cannot understand why she stopped us so abruptly when the Americans said nothing. We were discussing the topic, weren't we? 中

HoD: 中 Yes, we didn't talk off-topic. Maybe she was trying to act as a teacher, keeping the class in order, yet this was not a class. It was an exchange. She also explained to the Americans in the end, which was pointless. She seemed condescending by doing that. But since she is not our colleague and actually is from the American side, we'd better not ask her why she did that. This may embarrass her and us and may affect our *guanxi* with the American side. Just let it go. Do not mention it again. 中

As can be seen, the delegates could not understand why the interpreter behaved as she did but felt it would be too embarrassing for both her and them if they raised the matter with her. In contrast, American 1 commented afterwards to the field researcher that she found the interpreter's explanations extremely helpful. She construed the delegates' behavior as a 'cultural difference' which the interpreter had helped her understand.

Data extract 8: American Evaluation of Interpreting Incidents 2 & 3 (Comment to field researcher)

I did feel slightly uncomfortable when the group began talking, rather loudly and in an animated manner, after some of my answers. It was explained to me that this was not meant as disrespectful so I was fine with it. I think it was just a situation where cultural norms may be different in China versus in the U.S. I do not feel the visitors need to change their behavior, it just helps to explain to the speaker that this may happen and why, so they do not take it offensively. I take it as a compliment, now that I know, that my comments sparked debate and conversation amongst them and am not offended at all…I think the job the interpreter I worked with was ideal. She not only translated everything but was able to explain to me the meaning behind some of the questions and let me know that the things…were a normal part of Chinese culture. That was very helpful and made me feel better. Otherwise, I would have thought I said something offensive or was, perhaps, misunderstood.

In the second week of their trip, the delegation visited an influential professional association and further face sensitivities emerged. At the morning meeting, the HoD was not asked to give a return speech after the host's welcome speech, but when they were offered the opportunity to ask questions, the HoD took the opportunity to give a 5-minute speech. In the evening meeting, several of the delegates commented on this, with one referring to it as 'fighting for their face' (see Data extract 9).

Data extract 9: Return speech (Week 2, Workday 1 EM)

D6: 中 But the HoD did a very good job by making up for our return speech after the floor was open. This implied our firm position. 中

D14: 中 The HoD's move indicated our consciousness of this right and fought for our *face*. This was especially meaningful. 中

Then later that same day the HoD asked the American director if their subsequent schedule could be changed. She simply refused straightaway, saying it was too short notice. At the evening meeting, the delegates commented extensively on this 'blunt refusal', maintaining that it was impolite, that they had lost face and that if they had been the hosts, they would have been much more considerate.

Data extract 10: Request refusal (Week 2, Workday 1 EM)

D15: 中… she suddenly refused our request so firmly. Everything began to fall down. All the efforts that morning till that moment were almost in vain. Our *guanxi* fell down to the level at the starting point. 中

D3: 中 That's true. They were definitely impolite. She didn't want to know our reason for rescheduling at all. 中

D4: 中… it would have been an ideal opportunity for her to show the host's care for the guests by asking us why we wanted to change the schedule. …中

DHoD: 中… We won't refuse such a request …中

HoD: 中 We also lost a bit of *face*. 中

Despite these (and other) challenges, the delegation's overall evaluation of the trip was positive, as Data extra 11 shows.

Data extract 11: Final evaluation of trip (Week 3, Workday 3 EM)

HoD: 中 In the past three weeks, we have gradually elevated our delegation's *image* through business activities day in and day out. The primary goal of developing good *guanxi* with the Americans has been basically achieved. We did not encounter many sensitive topics and you did a good job in defusing problematic situations by a non-confrontational attitude. This has increased both our delegation's *face* and the Americans' *face*…中

DHoD: 中 As required by the HoD at the first meeting, every one of us has been contributing to elevating our delegation's *face* incessantly throughout this period. 中

Discussion

Throughout their evening reflections, the delegates displayed a very strong sense of ingroup/outgroup, yet at the same time they wanted to build good relations with their American counterparts. On the whole, they seem to have achieved this, despite the incidents reported above. What insights then do the incidents offer us in terms of the goals of our study (to examine (a) the extent to which types of face can be linked with people's personal values and act as motivational bases, and (b) the ways in which culture-level values interplay with context and language in affecting face sensitivities)?

Face needs and individual-level values

First, we consider the types of face concern that the Chinese officials experienced and how these relate to individual-level values. Three of the incidents were associated with concerns over status. With regard to the 'return speech' incident (Data extract 9), the delegates were expecting their HoD to be invited to give a return speech, as they felt this signaled equality (cf. Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008). So when they were not given that opportunity, the HoD stepped in and gave it immediately after they had been invited to raise any questions. The video footage shows surprise on the faces of the American hosts and they also seemed confused. It seems they had no expectation that each party would give a formal speech, and presumably were not aware that their visitors were expecting to be invited to give a return speech. Yet for the Chinese delegation, failure to have done so would have been tantamount to admitting they were of a lower status.

When the interpreter asked them to be quiet (Data extract 5), this was also a face threat to their status. They felt the interpreter was acting like a teacher and that she was treating them as lower status students. Since they wanted to continue discussing the points made by the speaker, it could also have been a threat to their autonomy. From the interpreter's perspective, though, she was presumably trying to continue with the question and answer session, since one delegate was trying to ask a question and, without raising her voice, neither she nor the speaker would be able to hear what he wanted to ask.

In terms of the security check incident (Data extract 2), this also was partly a threat to their status, in that they expected to receive special treatment, given their governmental status, and hence be exempted from the checks. However, there was also an element of moral dignity, because after they had removed their belts, several of them had to hold up their trousers as they walked through security and this was embarrassing for them.

In terms of mapping these face concerns against Schwartz's values (see Figure 1), it seems they all entailed self-enhancement threats, although the security check incident also had an element of conservation, especially conformity. The refusal of their request (Data extract 10), on the other hand, was a threat to their autonomy or self-direction. They wanted their request for a schedule change to be given at least a little consideration and found it face-threatening when it was bluntly refused. At the same time, they felt it reflected lack of care and consideration on the part of the American director. They evaluated her as impolite and, in that sense, she lost face in their eyes. In terms of Schwartz's values, the Chinese wanted their hosts to be open to change, and when they were not, they regarded them as uncaring (failing to show self-transcendence).

Lack of care or consideration also emerged in the first of the interpreter incidents (Data extract 3). The Chinese delegates noticed that the American speaker blushed when the interpreter asked her to speak in longer sentences – presumably a threat to her image as a competent speaker in intercultural contexts. Interestingly, however, the delegates commented not so much on the American speaker's face, but rather on the threat to their own face – concern that the request might be attributed to them and that the American(s) would regard them as lacking consideration for embarrassing the speaker in such a public context.

These various mappings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. A mapping of the face-sensitive incidents onto Schwartz's continuum of values and different face needs (cf. Figure 1 and Table 1)

Personal Focus		**Social Focus**	
Openness to change	**Self-enhancement**	**Self-transcendence**	**Conservation**
(Self-direction, Stimulation)	(Achievement, Power, Image)	(Universalism, Benevolence, Humility)	(Conformity, Tradition)
Face-threatening incidents			
• *Blunt refusal of the request for the schedule to be changed* • *Interesting discussion interrupted & stopped*	• *Equality undermined when opportunity to give return speech denied* • *Treated like children when told to be quiet* • *Status undermined when treated as 'ordinary' visitors for security checks*	• *American speaker's embarrassment could be regarded as lack of consideration on delegation's part* • *American director showed lack of consideration towards them when refused their request*	• *Dignity undermined when had to walk holding up trousers*
• Negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) • Autonomy face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987) • Competence face (Lim, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 2005) • Quality face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) • Status face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Fellowship face (Lim, 1994) • Inclusion face (Ting-Toomey, 2005) • Reliability face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)	• Moral face (Ting-Toomey, 2005)

Face needs and the interplay of culture-level values, context and language

To what extent, then, are the Chinese face sensitivities culturally based? According to Hofstede (2001), China scores high on power distance and high on collectivism. We do not know the values held by the individual delegation members, but their frequent concerns over status certainly align with high power distance values. On the other hand, they showed little other-oriented or mutual-oriented concern; they were primarily concerned about their own face (especially that of their group). This is particularly apparent in Interpreter Incident 1 (Data extract 3). Even though it was the American who had been embarrassed by the interpreter's request, the delegates related the issue exclusively to themselves – they were concerned lest they be perceived as inconsiderate. The same can be seen in the Request Refusal (Data extract 10), where they simply blamed the host rather than acknowledge the difficulty she would have had in making last minute schedule changes with so many senior government bodies involved. In other words, on both occasions they were more concerned about their own reputation or inconvenience than with the other person being put in an awkward situation or caused a lot of bother. This is out of line with Ting-Toomey's (2005, 2017) proposition and raises an interesting question: might face concern that is seemingly other- or mutually-oriented in fact reflect an underlying concern for self-face. Perhaps during this visit the overarching interactional goal of the Chinese delegation to enhance self-face (Data extract 1) mediated the macro-level ethos of I-C face orientation and the micro-level practice, and as a result, the self-face concerns of the delegation (and the Ministry) seemed to outweigh other- and mutual-face concerns. Alternatively, perhaps these 'backstage' comments among in-group members indicate that other- or mutual-face concerns attributed to collectivists in fact have an underlying self-face focus. More research is needed to explore this possibility.

With regard to Interpreter Incidents 2–3, the American speaker referred to 'cultural differences' (Data extract 8). So this raises the question as to whether speaking loudly and animatedly during a question and answer session in a language that the presenter is unfamiliar with reflects a cultural difference. While there may be procedural differences across cultures in conducting Q&A sessions after a talk (Allwood, 2000), it is also quite possible that this incident is not so much a reflection of cultural differences as lack of sensitivity to matters of language. It was clearly disconcerting to the American speaker to have no idea what the audience was saying and not to know whether they were annoyed, disapproving or exceptionally interested. Naturally, therefore, she appreciated the interpreter's explanation. However, the delegates seem to have been unaware of how their behavior (talking in a completely different language) might come across to the speaker, suggesting once again a lack of other-face sensitivity.

Concluding comments

With the help of this case study data, we have explored the impact of language, culture, and context on face concerns. We have demonstrated that the delegates' various types of face concerns can be mapped onto Schwartz's (Schwartz et al., 2012) circumplex of personal-level values and have linked several of the face sensitive incidents to concerns over status, which probably link to high power distance values. We have not found any support for Ting-Toomey's link between I-C and self-/other-face concerns. On the other hand, it is possible that situational factors such as interactional goals (purpose, in Allwoood's, 2000, terms) could mediate the impact of such values. Thus Ting-Toomey's (2017) recent emphasis on situational factors and personal attributes is greatly to be welcomed and is important for the analysis of various parts of this case study data. Ting-Toomey (2017) calls for 'more collaborative research effort' and we suggest that approaching these types of events from a language and social psychology perspective as we have done here is beneficial for this.

We acknowledge that there are limitations to the case study data presented here. Ideally, we would have wanted to learn more about the American hosts' reactions and interpretations, but practicalities prevented that. Space has also not allowed us to fully discourse the insights that Allwood's (2000) framework can offer. Nevertheless, we hope that the theorizing and data examples we have provided will stimulate people's interest and encourage more interdisciplinary work in this fascinating area, especially between linguists and social psychologists.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this article.

Notes

[1] Helpful glosses that explain the meaning of Schwartz's 19 values can be found in Schwartz et al. (2012, pp. 669, 687-668).

[2] For more details on the procedures used in this corpus analysis, along with a discussion of the similarities and differences between these Chinese terms, please see Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015).

[3] In all data extracts, *face, image* and *guanxi* have been italicised for ease of reference. Utterances originally in Chinese have the character 中 at the beginning and end. For the original Chinese in the extracts, please see Wang (2013).

[4] DHoD stands for Deputy Head of Delegation.

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