

Confucian Ethics Exhibited in the Discourse of Chinese Business and Marketing Communication

Yunxia Zhu

ABSTRACT. With the internationalisation of the Chinese market, Confucian ethics began to draw researchers' attention. However, little research has been conducted in the specific application of Confucian ethics in marketing communication. This article fills in the research gap by examining how Confucian ethics underpins the discourse of Chinese Expo invitations. Chinese sales managers' views are incorporated into the analysis as substantiation of findings. Confucian ethics embraces both *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason) and relevant ethical values such as *guanxi* (connections), *qing*, and *mianzi* (face) play an important role for advertising Expos and trade fairs. The study also highlights the complexities of Chinese Expo advertising that is embedded in inviting behaviour. These findings shed light on understanding Confucian ethics in marketing communications in general and have implications for ethical international marketing and advertising practices.

KEY WORDS: Confucian ethics, *mianzi*, *qing*, *li*, *guanxi*, *renqing*, reciprocity, genre, Expo invitations

Introduction

China is an increasingly important market to the world in this era of globalisation and internationalisation. Marketing communication such as advertising and sales promotion texts plays a significant role in Chinese economic and business development. According to Chan (2008), Confucian ethics has laid an important foundation for the Chinese business practice. Therefore, it is essential for Western business firms to understand how Confucian ethics (Chan, 2008) has been applied to specific area of marketing communication, which is also the aim of this article. The particular area this article investigates is Chinese Expo invitations, or invitations to

promote trade fairs, which is one of the most popular sales texts to promote products in China (Zhu, 1997). An additional reason for choosing this text for analysis is that Chinese Expo invitations involve complicated culture-specific politeness behaviour which is likely to trigger ethical issues in international or cross-cultural marketing communications – a point to be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Ethics is the cognitive, analytical, systematic and reflective application of moral principles to complex, conflicting or unclear situations (Wine, 2008, p. 487). These moral principles or philosophical foundations include both the Western and the Eastern traditions, and a most representative of the Eastern traditions is Confucian ethics (Chan, 2008). Chan (2008) contends that Confucian ethics is not merely about impairment of business activities, but rather to emphasise the significance of human virtues and the adoption of a proper focus towards the striving for human virtue and profits, respectively. Chan's claim is also in alignment with virtue ethics (e.g. MacIntyre, 1996; Solomon, 1992) that stresses being and the application of human virtues in the business and commercial life. Some of the important virtues of Confucian ethics include *guanxi* or connections and interdependence (Chan, 2008; Leung and Wong, 2001; Hoivik, 2007). In light of the above definition about Confucian ethics, this article aims to explore in what way Confucian ethics is applied in Chinese Expo invitations. The rationale for doing this research is explicated below.

Expo invitations are a common genre of marketing communication to promote trade fairs and attract prospective buyers (Blythe, 2000), and they involve not only advertising of Expos products but

also appropriate use of inviting behaviour relating to high level of politeness, respect and interdependence (Zhu, 1997; Zhuge and Chen, 1994). The situation Chinese Expo invitations involves can be even more complex in an international marketing context. For example, New Zealand managers may not understand the Confucian ethics – a Chinese invitation attempts to communicate, and it may be interpreted as ethically inappropriate as shown in this example cited from an authentic Expo invitation:

The General Director of Your Honoured Company,

It is decided that the Zhengzhou Computer Software Show will be held on December 1, 2006 in the Science and Technology Centre. We would like to seek your cooperation and sincerely invite you participate in this show.

I solicited very different responses when showing this invitation to a Chinese and a New Zealand manager. The Chinese manager believes that this invitation shows high level of respect by using honorific forms to address the reader and it also expresses *guanxi* and interdependence as the writer wishes to seek cooperation with the reader. The New Zealand manager, however, thought that ‘Honoured Company’ was inappropriately used as a salutation. In addition, he felt intimidated and pushed under the pressure of ‘seeking for cooperation’. As a consequence, one’s culture virtues, the Confucian ethics in this case, were interpreted by another culture as intrusion of personal space, which also caused a sense of insecurity deriving from this intrusion.

The clash of different views across cultures about invitation can even go further surrounding ethical issues of workplace harassment. For example, Zhu and Thompson (2000) vividly described how repeated telephone invitations by a Chinese academic were eventually interpreted by an Australian student as an unethical behaviour relating to sexual harassment. Although Expo invitations may not necessarily be related to sexual harassment, similar type of conflicts relating to privacy and personal space can occur. Adequate attention should, therefore, be given to Confucian ethics underpinning appropriate behaviour in Chinese Expo invitations. One pertinent research question is: what kinds of Confucian ethics, then, are Chinese marketers adhering to in advertising Expo promotions? Similar

questions are also asked by Nill and Schibrowsky (2007) in a more general sense for marketers. What is more complex is the fact that the traditional ethics is frequently mixed with advertising strategies. To what extent, then, is Confucian ethics compatible to advertising strategies?

Cultural differences in Chinese marketing and business communication have long drawn researchers’ attention (e.g. Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998; Paik and Tung, 1999; Zhu et al., 2007). For example, Chinese business communication (in either spoken or written forms) is often explained as following circular (Zhu, 1997) or indirect and ambiguous styles (Adair and Brett, 2005; Zhu, 2008). These interesting observations offer a glimpse about the patterns of Chinese communication that are significantly different from the Western communication behaviour. These research findings about cultural differences can also apply to marketing communication. However, very few researches look at the cultural differences from the perspective of Confucian ethics. This perspective would explain fully why Chinese advertising behaviour in marketing communication differs so significantly from other cultures and what the Chinese ethical and philosophical underpinnings are. Therefore, it is imperative to explore these underpinnings as they may entail ethical dimensions (Whysall, 2000).

Recent research interest in Confucian ethics (e.g. Chan, 2008; Hoivik, 2007) offers further insight about Chinese ethics for conducting business in general. For example, Chan (2008) elaborated on the concepts of *guanxi* (connections), interdependence and *harmony* as the key for understanding Confucian ethics. These virtues have also been accepted as the cornerstone of the Chinese culture and society (e.g. Ghauri and Fang, 2001; Hofstede and Bond 1998; Kit-Chun, 2003; Koehn, 2001; Luo, 2007; Pan, 2000; Paik and Tung, 1999; Sheer and Chen, 2003; Ulijn, et al., 2005; Zhu and Zhang, 2007). This article aims to further promote the research of Confucian ethics in marketing communication and explore its application in Chinese Expo invitations.

Specifically, this article, first of all, develops a guiding conceptual framework based on relevant Confucian ethics and politeness behaviour. Secondly, it applies discourse analysis as a major research method to examine Confucian ethics applied in Chinese

marketing communication. A detailed account of the advertising texts can illustrate how language is used to promote Expos and Confucian ethics. In addition, this article also incorporates sales managers' views as further substantiation of the analysis.

Guiding conceptual framework

Research issues about ethics in international marketing

A detailed account by Nill and Schibrowsky (2007) about research on ethics in marketing poses a wide range of research concerns. Out of these concerns, there are two areas of particular relevance to this study. One is about the social and interpersonal roles a marketer plays for advertising products. The other is knowledge about the ethical values underpinning these roles, in particular, in the international context.

Blythe (2000, p. 145) states that one of the important roles in marketing communication is related to activities directly related to sales. Sales promotion texts are often seen as implementation of advertising strategies such as AIDA, which stands for attracting reader's attention and interest, stimulating reader's desire to own the product and calling for action (Eunson, 2005). These textbooks also assume these rules are universally applicable to all sales promotion texts. Two issues arise from these assumptions. The first is that this prescription of marketing roles focuses too much on business objectives and much less attention is given to human virtues. The second issue is that it does not pay adequate attention to the cultural context the sales promotion text is situated in. The roles or responsibilities for marketing communication can vary from culture to culture. For example, cross-cultural issues and problems may arise when different cultures have conflicting virtues as shown in the scenario discussed at the beginning of this article. Therefore, understanding marketing and advertising behaviour in the Chinese context is very important for international marketers. Confucian ethics will provide some clues to addressing these issues.

Confucian ethics and the qing-orientation

A comprehensive review about Confucian ethics can be found in Chan (2008) and Hoivik (2007) who

contend that Confucian ethics is based on moral self-cultivation and the development of human virtues, rather than based on business profits. They stress some essential Confucian ethics which include *guanxi*, *renqing* (humanized feelings), interdependence, reciprocity and harmony. A similar view is also shared by Miao (2005) who stresses the important role Confucian ethics plays in Chinese modern business practice.

First of all, *guanxi* reflects the Chinese networking system. As Chan (2008) contends that *guanxi* specifically reflects the interpersonal relations centring on the Chinese hierarchical system of interpersonal and familial relations such as the relationship between father and son, and husband and wife. Fei (1985) offers a vivid account about how *guanxi* works in China through a system of concentric social circles, the innermost circle being ones self and the family members, followed by subsequent circles of siblings, relatives, friends and colleagues. Therefore, self identity only exists in relation to its *guanxi* or reference with others. The true meaning of 'self' is, therefore, collectively defined. This type of *guanxi* model is important for marketing communication, and marketers have to develop interpersonal relations with the reader besides a seller-buyer relationship.

Guanxi can be understood in relation to *renqing* or *ganqing*, which can be translated literally into 'humanized feelings' (Ghauri and Fang, 2001). However, the application of these feelings can be quite complicated. According to Chu (1991), *renqing* can have two connotations, and besides the humanized feelings as noted earlier, it also refers to the sympathetic give-and-take that governs relationship or *guanxi* and social exchange in the Chinese culture.

In addition, interdependence, reciprocity and harmony will promote *guanxi* or the social concentric circle in China. The notion of reciprocity is significant for understanding marketing communication. Although it is often explained as exchanging favours (Chan, 2008; Su and Littlefield, 2001), the bottom line of the concept lies in basic human behaviour relating to indebtedness and return of favours. In marketing communication, reciprocity is related to giving respect to each other. Existing research (e.g. Chan, 2008; Fei, 1985) suggests that the concepts of interdependence and harmony are an

important dimension to keep *guanxi* or the social concentric circles in order. At a more macro-level, these interpersonal relations are also important for keeping social order (Shih, 1959).

In addition, the Confucian ethics of *mainzi* (face) also needs to be noted. *Mainzi* is similar to face which is about positive image of self (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). However, it is also different from face in that it has a collectivistic connotation and can be related to the reputation and face of the group (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hu, 1944). For example, keeping and giving *mainzi* is important to keep everyone's role in place and adequate level of respect is also required to keep *mainzi*.

Politeness behaviour in invitations

Chinese invitation involves a systematic use of politeness behaviour embedded in Confucian ethics, which also represents a difference from some other cultures. According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), an invitation is a directive behaviour used to get the addressee to do something. Politeness in invitations, as well as in Expo invitations, can thus be related to using appropriate language forms to achieve sales promotion objectives.

Leech (1983) contends that polite language is likely to be seen as minimising the addressee's cost and maximising his/her benefits, and the opposite is true for the addresser. Politeness behaviour can also be further explained in the light of Brown and Levinson's face-saving theory. Many actions we do with words are potential face-threatening acts, such as requests and invitations (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The addresser is thus often confronted with negative face and has to address it by applying Leech's (1983) principles, in which maximising the addressee's benefits is the dominant strategy to gain politeness.

However, how to maximise the addressee's benefits can be culture-specific. According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), people from the low-context cultures such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand are characterised by a need for an individual public self-image, whilst people from high context cultures such as China tend to stress a collaborative public self-image. In the case of Expo promotion

invitations, the American, Australian or New Zealand marketers tend to stress individual autonomy, and therefore, reducing imposition upon the invitee is likely to be the major persuasive strategy. The Chinese marketers, in contrast, prefer to be seen by others as collaborative, host-like, sincere and respectful. Accordingly, they may adopt relevant persuasive strategies, such as showing respect and establishing host-guest relationships, besides imposition reduction, which can be seen in congruence with the emphasis on *renqing* (humanized feelings) and interdependence. Research findings (e.g. Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ge, 2004; Hu and Grove, 1991; Miao, 2005) so far have substantiated the importance of *renqing* and relationship building in Chinese culture in contrast to the emphasis of individual achievements and transit goals in the western culture.

Invitations are a type of written text. According to Chen (1947), one of the important criteria of good writing is to indicate both *qing* (emotional approach) and '*li*' (logical approach). These principles have been well accepted by Chinese writing theories such as reiterated in Li (1996). The explicitly preferred *qing* can be seen as part of the Confucian ethics relating to harmony, independence, *mianzi* and reciprocity as well.

Chinese textbooks on Expo invitation writing also indicate a strong combination of both '*qing*' and '*li*'. Invitations are often described as a type of '*liyi xin*' (letters of etiquette) or '*shejiao xin*' (letters of social contact) (e.g. Lu et al., 1993). The meaning of '*shejiao*' (social contact) is readily apparent; however, '*liyi xin*' needs some explanation. According to Zhuge and Chen (1994, p. 361), '*liyi*' means etiquette and ceremonies. Accordingly, Chinese sales invitations are treated as a form of etiquette for building relationships in which *qing* plays an important role as indicated by the honorific address term 'Honourable Company' in the excerpt of the Chinese Expo invitation at the beginning of this article.

It needs to be noted that these politeness behaviours, such as *mianzi* (face), are culture-specific and can easily trigger ethical issues ranging from privacy to harassment in international marketing communication. Therefore, adequate attention should be given to Confucian ethics underpinning Chinese advertising behaviour in Expo invitations.

Methods

Data

The data are composed of two sources. The first source includes 40 Expo promotion invitations selected from a corpus of 245 invitations collected from four sales firms in six major Chinese cities including Shenzhen, Zhengzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Beijing and Zhuhai. They were selected based upon the follow criteria. First, the texts had to be invitations, with the term *yaoping xin* (invitation) written in the heading, and this ruled out those letters that do not have headings although inviting may be expressed in the content. Invitation headings were preferred because headings in an invitation are an important characteristic of an invitation. Secondly, they had to be advertising texts promoting a wide range products, such as computers, motor vehicles, and agricultural products. In light of these criteria, invitations to corporate training sessions and professional conferences were excluded.

The second source of data derived from Chinese sales managers' views from 100 questionnaires and two focus-group interviews. The questionnaire was used to solicit managers' views about the major purposes of Expo invitations. As discussed earlier, Chinese invitations are very complex involving not only sales and advertising but also developing interpersonal relations with potential customers. Their views were also analysed in relation to compatibility of Confucian ethics to marketing communications. The second item on the questionnaire form was about the formulaic items such as the specific forms of salutations. Invitations tend to use polite linguistic forms for salutations (Lu et al., 1993). Accordingly, managers were asked to grade their preferences about the use of formulaic items.

Two follow-up focus-group interviews were conducted in sales firms in Shenzhen and Zhengzhou to solicit more in-depth input from managers. The number of people in the focus group ranged from six to eight. These managers also took part in the questionnaire, and they were randomly chosen based on their availability. The Chinese all had at least an undergraduate education, worked in their enterprises for at least 3 years and had experience in reading or drafting advertising texts in a business

context. Therefore, their attitudes were taken to represent professional attitudes, and reflect the shared conventions of the business community.

The venue for the interviews was a meeting room on a company site. The duration for each of the focus-group interviews was approximately one hour. The whole interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. At the interview, I played the role of a facilitator making sure the discussion followed the proposed interview tasks. The first task was to let them reflect on general principles and ethics for writing sales invitations. I gave them this scenario to reflect on: Supposing you were to write a trade fair invitation to your potential customers, what criteria do you think are appropriate for writing it up? They were pretty much left alone brain-storming and discussing the criteria themselves. Subsequently I summed up their views, and the major points will be included in this article.

Units of analysis

This article uses discourse analysis to examine the Expo invitations. Extensive discourse approaches have been developed since Harris (1952) extends the analysis of discourse from clauses to texts, hence stressing the meanings embedded in text. For example, more recently, van Dijk (1997a, b) stresses the importance of discourse as structure and processes, and interactions. This article will pay particular attention to the structure, processes and interaction of the discourse exhibited in the Chinese Expo invitations. Genre analysis (e.g. Bakhtin, 1986; Swales, 1990) is used as the major approach for this article because of its major focus on written discourse to which Expo invitations belong. According to genre researchers (e.g. Gunthner and Knoblauch, 1995; Hyland, 1998; Miller, 1984; Orlikowski and Yates, 1994; Swales, 1990), genre is defined as a type of text, and is situated in its socio-cultural context. Swales (1990) explains that it is composed of purposes that are realised in moves and linguistic forms. A move is defined by Swales (1990) as an action and a communicative event such as introducing the products in sales promotion texts. These features are also known as genre conventions that are shared by members of discourse community

(Swales, 1990) or community of social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). On the basis of genre theory, these components and units of genre are of particular relevance to this study:

1. Purposes
2. Overall structure of the Expo invitation text
3. Moves and linguistic forms of inviting and advertising the products
4. Manager's views about various levels of texts

These four components are used to reflect the specific ways of applying Confucian ethics from various

levels of marketing communication. Purposes are the most important component of genre the structure and moves are a realisation of purposes. In order to minimise the biases of analysis, this article also includes managers' views as substantiation of findings. In addition, their views also provide ethnographic clues about ethical values for marketing communications in general.

A translated version of a sample invitation is included here as illustration and this sample also reflects the general features of the corpus. Note that the bold categories in the left-hand column represent specific moves of the Expo invitation.

Headline	Banking China
	Invitation to China Computer Show (date)
Salutation	Respectable Reader
Background information	The Chinese economy is developing rapidly. Every industry or business has to promote its technology so as to increase its competitiveness. In order to meet the needs of the industries and businesses concerned, Banking China and China Computer Show (this year) are to be held in December in Beijing. We sincerely invite your (H) company to participate.
Introducing	
Inviting	
Advertising	This show is to be held on a grand scale. (Names of the participating countries omitted.) Internationally well known companies dealing with bank security, computers, telecommunication and automation equipment will exhibit their latest advanced equipment for financial, banking and other industrial and commercial enterprises. The commercial councils from Australia, Singapore, and Colorado State of the United States will also organise delegations to take part. This show will exhibit all kinds of latest equipment and systems used in banking and financial enterprises. (The detailed exhibits omitted.)
Incentives	Through participating in this exhibition, your (H) company can meet more than seventy producers or suppliers from more than ten countries and districts, and talk about co-operative plans with them. (You are) welcome to leave your on-site exhibited products for sale. In addition to this, many technology exchange discussions will also be held so that visitors may have a further understanding of all the participants' advanced products.
Inviting again	Our company sincerely invites managerial and technical representatives from your (H) company to visit (H) this Exhibition. Enclosed is an invitation card. Please bring this invitation card with you when you come to the International Exhibition Centre to go through admission formalities.
Registration	
Further Contact	If you need further details, you can contact the Beijing agency of Exhibition Services Ltd: Miss XXX Contact details (Phone number and mailing address Omitted)
Polite closing	Wish (you) good health (H)!
Signature and Date	XXX Exhibition Services Ltd. (Date)

Analysis and discussion

Purposes

The most obvious and major purpose of a sales invitation is to invite the reader to attend an exhibition, and to elicit the desired response, and this involves a complex process. The complexity increases when both sales and inviting have to be taken into consideration. Based on the observation of the data the following purposes are identified and these purposes are also evident in the above sample invitation.

1. To give *mainzi* (face) and invite the reader to attend the exhibition
2. To build a host–guest relationship with the reader
3. To attract the reader’s attention and interest
4. To persuade the reader to attend the exhibition

In general, the above purposes can be divided into two kinds: inviting the reader to the exhibition and advertising the exhibition. Inviting is the unique feature of this genre, whilst advertising the exhibition is quite similar to advertising in general.

The first two purposes are clearly related to *guanxi* and *mianzi*. The last two purposes are related partly to the marketing model of AIDA. For example, attracting the reader’s attention and interest make up the first two stages of the AIDA model. These purposes indicate that Confucian ethics such as *mianzi* is compatible to advertising strategies and is used as an important underpinning for promoting products and inviting potential customers to sales Expo.

The findings by and large correspond to managers’ preferences. In the questionnaire, the managers were asked to grade the importance of the purposes. They were given a list of the above four purposes and were asked to grade them as 1 (very important), 2 (quite important), 3 (not so important), and 4 (not important). Figure 1 shows the results of their rating.

As shown in Figure 1, the managers rated *mianzi* for invitation and persuasiveness in advertising the Expo as the most important purposes, hence substantiating my claim about the compatibility of Confucian ethics to the advertising of the Expo. In addition, the managers also rated relationship building (*guanxi*) as quite important, and the level of

important is slightly above ‘attracting interest’. Although their preferences reflect a balanced view of both *qing* and *li*, or marketing and advertising embedded in Confucian ethics.

Content: the overall structure

The overall structure of the invitation further reflects how Confucian ethics underpin the advertising practice. A range of moves are identified in the corpus:

Formulaic moves:

1. Heading
2. Opening moves:

Salutation
Greetings

3. Closing moves:

Invitation-related closings or good-wishes
Signature and date

Content moves:

1. Introducing the exhibition

Providing background information
Indicating background objectives
Providing information about the exhibition

2. Inviting the reader
3. Establishing credentials
4. Describing the exhibition

Providing essential details of the exhibition
Evaluating the exhibition or the exhibits

5. Offering incentives

Indicating benefits the exhibition may bring
Offering a special rate

6. Providing registration details

Giving registration details
Giving further contact information

As shown above, Expo invitations have two kinds of moves: the formulaic moves and the content moves.

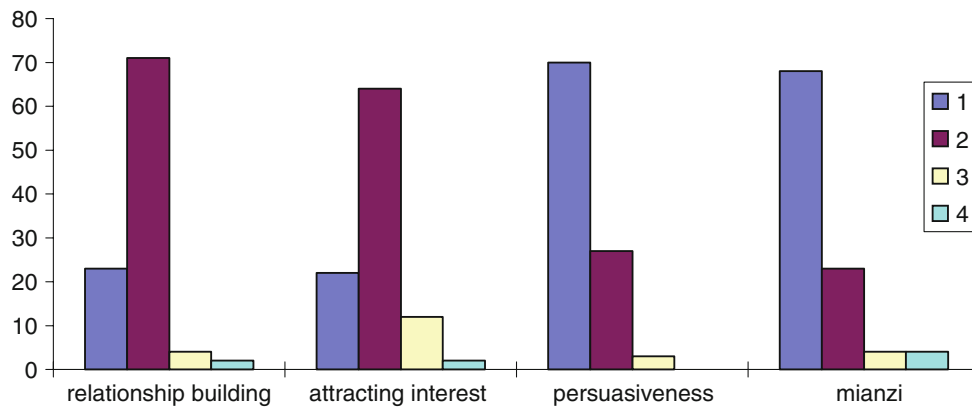


Figure 1. The managers' preferences (%). Note: In the diagrams, the columns numbered 1, 2, 3, 4 stand for the four grades. The vertical axis shows the percentage of each group who chose each grade of the four purposes.

The formulaic moves are related to inviting, and relationship building, as they are important features of an invitation. In content moves, Move 1 is related to the purpose of informing the reader about the exhibition, Move 2 relates to the purpose of inviting the reader, Move 3 relates to attracting the reader's interest, Move 4 relates to giving positive appraisals and persuading the reader to attend the exhibition, Move 5 relates to persuading the reader, and Move 6 is to inform the reader and encourage further communication.

These moves are a further elaboration about how Confucian ethics underpin the advertising of Expo. As illustrated in the sample invitation, the advertising-related moves are sandwiched between formulaic moves in the invitation. The formulaic moves also reflect the Confucian ethics. In addition, inviting behaviour will also be analysed in more depth.

Linguistic realisation of formulaic moves

The formulaic moves include headings, salutations, greetings, good-wishes, invitation-related closings, and signature and date. The social distance between the writer and the reader in all the invitations of the corpus was basically the same. They are invitations sent between companies, and a writer who represents one company invites the reader who represents another.

All the forty Expo invitations have *Yaoqing Xin* (invitation) as a heading which indicates clearly the inviting behaviour. Some invitations also include a card to invite the reader. A range of salutations were

found in the corpus including *gui gongsi* (Honoured Company), *jing qizhe* (respectable reader), title plus surname, person in charge, ladies and gentlemen. Only one invitation does not have any salutation (hence 'ø salutation'). The specific forms of salutations pose a sharp contrast with English invitations which often address the reader by name. The level of respect in the Chinese Expo invitation also varies and in all, they represent a politeness continuum to give reader a certain kind of *mianzi* (face). For example, *gui gongsi* (Honoured Company), *jing qizhe* (respectable reader) are both polite and formal and the latter is also a polite classic salutation for letter-writing.

Managers' views were solicited about the importance of *mianzi* and politeness images and the questionnaire results are presented in Table I.

Table I shows *gui gongsi* and *jingqizhe* are ranked most appropriate, and ø salutation was seen as the least appropriate. A high-level of respect and *mianzi*

TABLE I

The results of rating (mean score) about preferences of salutations

Salutation	Managers	Rank
1. <i>gui gongsi</i> (Honoured Company)	5.09	1
2. <i>jingqizhe</i> (Respectable Reader)	4.95	2
3. Respectable Mr/Ms plus surname	3.2	3
4. Person in charge	2.98	4
5. Ladies and gentlemen	1.22	5
6. ø Salutation	1.02	6

are apparently preferred by the managers. The managers rated ϕ salutations the least appropriate, agreeing that an invitation should have a salutation. They also agreed that salutations were especially important for invitations, because invitations represented a polite and respectful register. An invitation without a salutation would not indicate appropriate politeness or respect for the reader. There were only slight differences in the rating of the address terms of 'Mr plus surname' and 'person in charge'. The managers' preferences were similar to the findings in the corpus hence further confirming the analysis.

The closing moves used in sales invitations

Closings are often written in honorific or respectful forms. Consider the following frequently used form as an example: It is an honour to invite you. This closing is related to an invitation as indicated in the term *gong qing* (respectfully invite), and is often used in invitations. It is written in honorific form, thus showing more respect to the reader than those without. This is a feature typical of an invitation in which the writer is expected to show high respect to the reader, and in this way, this kind of closing can help to achieve the purpose of relationship building between the writer and the reader as inviter and invitee.

Similar respect can also be found in forms of good-wishes, such as *zhu daan* (wish you good health). These good-wishes are representative of using respectable words to indicate high-level respect. Although there are no fixed rules about what honorific forms can be used in the closing, a professional writer with appropriate world schemata would know the general guidelines and meet the level of respect required by an invitation.

Inviting behaviour

The inviting behaviour is exhibited as a particular move in the invitation which is employed by all the 40 invitations. This move is characterised by the use of respectful and honorific linguistic forms. When an appropriate degree of respect is used, the invitee will feel honoured. Here *mianzi* comes into play. The Chinese common saying about reciprocity goes: If

you respect me one inch, I will respect you ten times more. Therefore, the polite use of language is very important here as a means of showing *mianzi* and respect, and is also consistent with forms used for the formulaic moves.

In this move, the writers often use verbs relating to 'inviting' especially the verb *yaoqing* (invite), which can be used both as a verb and a noun. For example, *chengyi* meaning 'sincerely' is often used to modify *yaoqing* to indicate the writer's sincerity:

Chengyi yaoqing gui gongsi paiyuan qingwang canguan.

We sincerely invite (*chengyi yaoqing*) your (H) company to come and visit.

Note the honorific form for the company is also used to match the level of *mianzi* in this example.

There are three other compound verbs used which express a similar meaning to *yaoqing* (invite): *teyao* (specially invite), *jingqing* (respectfully invite) and *gongqing* (respectfully invite). The list of similar respectable expressions goes on and the various combination of expressions and words show how hard the writer actually tries to give *mianzi* and respect to the reader, which matches the level of respect of the invitation in general.

The application of Confucian ethics relating to harmony is explicitly expressed by a direct quote from Confucius' teachings:

Huan yi nimen dao Wenzhou zuoke. You peng zi yuanfan lai, bu yi le hu?

Welcome everyone to come to Wenzhou to be our guests! How happy we will be if we have friends coming from afar!

In the above example, the second sentence is a citation from Analects, which has also become a common saying in Chinese culture. Therefore, the application of Confucian ethics and the need for developing social concentric circles are self-evident.

Another relevant point worth noting is the phenomenon of inviting the reader more than once. For example, one Expo invitation invites the reader this way:

(1) ingqing gui danwei jieshi paiyuan canjia shenghui!

(We) respectfully invite your (H) company to attend this grand exhibition.

(2) *jiecheng huanying guanglin!*

(We) wholeheartedly welcome (your) presence (H).

In the above example, the first invitation is expressed by the verbal phrase *jingqing* and the second by another verbal phrase *jiecheng huanying guanglin*. Note that both types of inviting tend to use honorific (H) forms to match the respect and politeness of this genre.

Twelve Expo invitations (30%) invite the reader more than once, and this phenomenon is worthy of note as it is related to Confucian ethics in inviting behaviour. Although in form this repetition is a kind of redundancy, if it is put in the Chinese cultural context, it does not represent redundancy at all. In everyday conversation, people often repeat an invitation to express hospitality. The more times the host repeats the invitation, the more hospitality and sincerity are exhibited. If the host invites the guest only once, the guest may think that the host is only following some kind of ritual and does not mean to invite. If the host insists on the invitation again and again, the addressee will take it as a sincere invitation and know that the host means what s/he is saying. Although the written form is different from oral invitations, repeated inviting appears to be influenced by this ritualistic practice. According to Chen (1991, p. 106), repetition in invitations is sometimes necessary as it may indicate the writer's cordiality and sincerity towards the reader.

However, the repetition of inviting behaviour can easily cause ethical issues to other cultures as it can be related to imposition and intrusion of other people's territories. As noted earlier, Zhu and Thompson (2000) found that the Chinese hospitality and the verbal realisation of host's obligations such as repeated invitations are likely to be explained by people from other cultures as unethical and as intruding other people's privacy and space.

Managers' views further prove the importance of apply Confucian ethics for Expo invitation. Here are some of their comments about the preferred and they agree that Expo invitations should:

1. promote trade fairs and invite the reader respectfully
2. make sure to invite the relevant company members and give *mianzi* to all
3. have a clear style including relevant information about the trade fair

4. invite the reader courteously as a host

5. use *yaoqing xin* (invitation) as a headline and use respectful language

The first comment is related to promoting the trade fair and inviting behaviour. Both *qing* and *li*, and Confucian ethics and advertising are highlighted. They also stressed that *qing* (emotion) should be used appropriately based on the *guanxi* of the reader-writer relationships. This comment also indicates their knowledge of *shejiao* (social networking) invitation genres, which requires a high level of respect and *mianzi*. The second and third comments are about the formulaic components. The Chinese managers thought that it was appropriate to include all the relevant members in the invitation as part of the social networking ritual for *guanxi*. This collectivistic view is a reflection of Confucian ethics on harmony and reciprocity. The fourth and final comments stress the *qing* and politeness rituals required by *shejiao xin* (letters of social contact) reinforcing harmony. In this way, the managers' comments for writing sales invitations indicate a balanced combination of *qing* (emotion) and *li* (reason), which further conforms the application of Confucian ethics in advertising and marketing communication.

In general, the Chinese managers preferred to be seen as collaborative, host-like, sincere and respectful, thus indicating a strong *qing* (emotion) underlined by Confucian ethics.

Conclusion

This article has examined the specific application of Confucian ethics in Chinese Expo invitations. In particular, it discussed the important sets of Confucian ethics including *guanxi*, interdependence, harmony and *mianzi* (face) as important underpinnings for advertising the Chinese Expo or trade fairs. These underpinnings were also found to be compatible with Western advertising strategies. As an additional contribution, this article has highlighted the complexities of Chinese Expo advertising embedded in inviting behaviour governed by politeness principles. These principles are largely different from those used by English Expo invitations. The differences are likely to trigger ethical issues in international marketing. Therefore, a marketer without

these types of knowledge can run the risk of violating these politeness principles in marketing (e.g. an overdo or under-play of the politeness behaviour), which may lead to ethical issues of harassment or damaging customer relations. These findings about culture-specific advertising complexities can also apply to Chinese marketing communications in general. Therefore, the model of genre analysis can be replicated for analysing other genres of marketing communication.

The genre approach was appropriate as it provided a systematic account about exactly what language could do to promote sales and Confucian ethics at the same time. Managers' views offered an in-depth perspective to justify the analysis and also to highlight the areas where potential ethical issues may arise. Similar approaches can also apply to analyse complex behaviour of marketing communications to identify and avoid potential ethical issues in relation to Confucian ethics.

This study has implications for understanding culture-specific business ethics for relationship marketing and marketing communications. Confucian ethics and the *qing*-orientations in advertising can serve as a guiding principle for marketers to build interpersonal relations with prospective customers in the Chinese market. It is also essential for marketers to identify specific types of Confucian ethics used in other types of advertising texts. For example, *mianzi* (face), harmony and interdependence were essential for Expo invitations. Other types of Confucian ethics can be more emphasised in other types of advertising such as Internet and emails based on their use of politeness behaviour. Identifying the appropriate use of Confucian ethics is essential for establishing appropriate and effective relationships with prospective customers.

This study has limitations focussing solely on analysing Chinese Expo invitations. Further research should be conducted using discourse analysis to identify what the Confucian ethics are applied in different genres of marketing communications. More importantly, systematic study should be conducted to see how Confucian ethics is applied in different advertising and marketing contexts. As the analysis indicated, the Chinese invitation behaviour involved not only advertising but also politeness behaviour, and host's obligations. Therefore, future research should look at how marketing can interact with other types of

politeness behaviour besides inviting. All in all, a systematic discourse analysis of these interactions can offer linguistic cues about potential ethical issues so that they be identified and addressed in a timely manner.

References

- Adair, W. L. and J. M. Brett: 2005, 'The Negotiation Dance: Time, Culture, and Behavioural Sequences in Negotiation', *Organisation Science* **16**(1), 33–51.
- Austin, J. L.: 1962, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford University Press, New York).
- Bakhtin, M. M.: 1986, *'Speech Genres' and Other Late Essays* (University of Texas Press, Austin).
- Blythe, J.: 2000, *Marketing Communications* (Prentice Hall, London).
- Brown, P. and S. Levinson: 1987, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).
- Chan, G. K. Y.: 2008, 'The Relevance and Value of Confucianism in Contemporary Business Ethics', *Journal of Business Ethics* **77**, 347–360.
- Chen, W. D.: 1947, *Xiuci Xue Fafan (An Introduction to Rhetoric)* (Zhongguo Wenhua Fuwushe, Shanghai) (First Edition in 1932).
- Chen, W. (ed.): 1991, *Shunxin Daquan (A Comprehensive Introduction to Letter Writing)* (Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, Shanghai).
- Chu, C. N.: 1991, *The Asian Mind Game – Unlocking the Hidden Agenda of the Asian Business Culture – a Westerner's Survival Manual* (Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, NY).
- Eunson, B.: 2005, *Communicating in the 21st Century* (John Wiley & Son, Melbourne).
- Fei, X.: 1985, *Shihui diaocha zibai (Statement Regarding Social Investigations)* (Zhishi Chuban She, Shanghai).
- Gao, G. and S. Ting-Toomey: 1998, *Communicating Effectively with Chinese* (Sage, London).
- Ge, J.: 2004, 'Confucianism and Confucian Businessman', *Journal of Hebei University* **5**, 3–4.
- Ghauri, P. and T. Fang: 2001, 'Negotiating with the Chinese: A Socio-Cultural Analysis', *Journal of World Business* **36**(3), 303–325.
- Gunthner, S. and H. Knoblauch: 1995, 'Culturally Patterned Speaking Practices: The Analysis of Communicative Genres', *Pragmatics* **5**(1), 1–32.
- Harris, Z. S.: 1952, 'Discourse Analysis', *Language* **28**, 1–30.
- Hofstede, G. H. and M. H. Bond: 1988, 'The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth', *Organizational Dynamics* **16**(4), 4–21.
- Hoivik, H. V. W.: 2007, 'East Meets West: Tacit Messages About Business Ethics in Stories Told by Chinese Managers', *Journal of Business Ethics* **74**, 457–469.

- Hu, H. C.: 1944, 'The Chinese Concept of 'Face'', *American Anthropologist* **46**(1), 45–64.
- Hu, W. and C. L. Grove: 1991, *Encountering the Chinese: A Guide for Americans* (Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME).
- Hyland, K.: 1998, 'Exploring Corporate Rhetoric: Metadiscourse in the CEOs Letter', *Journal of Business Communication* **35**(2), 224–245.
- Kit-Chun, J. L.: 2003, 'Confucian Business Ethics and the Economy', *Journal of Business Ethics* **43**, 153–162.
- Koehn, D.: 2001, 'Confucian Trustworthiness and the Practice of Business in China', *Business Ethics Quarterly* **11**(3), 415–429.
- Lave, J. and E. Wenger: 1991, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).
- Leech, G.: 1983, *Principles of Pragmatics* (Longman, New York).
- Leung, T. K. P. and Y. H. Wong: 2001, 'The Ethics and Positioning of Guanxi in China', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* **19**(1), 55–64.
- Li, X.: 1996, "Good Writing" in *Cross-Cultural Context* (State University of New York Press, Albany).
- Lu, P., Y. Zhang and S. He (eds.): 1993, *Waimao yu shangmao yingyong wushu yuedu xiezu 200 ti (Two Hundred Topics on Reading and Writing Skills of Practical Documents in Business and International Business* (Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, Guangzhou).
- Luo, Y.: 2007, *Guanxi and Business*, 2nd Edition (World Scientific, Singapore).
- MacIntyre, A.: 1996, *After Virtue, a Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd Edition (Duckworth, London).
- Miao, Z.: 2005, 'lu rujia jingji luli sixiang yu xin rushang de jiazhi quxiang, (Confucian Economic Ethics and Value Direction of Neo-Confucian Businessman)', *Contemporary Economics and Management* **27**(5), 56–59.
- Miller, C. R.: 1984, 'Genre as Social Action', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **70**, 151–167.
- Nill, A. and J. A. Schibrowsky: 2007, 'Research on Marketing Ethics: A Systematic Review of the Literature', *Journal of Macromarketing* **27**, 256–273.
- Orlikowski, W. and J. Yates: 1994, 'Genre Repertoire: The Structuring of Communicative Practices in Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly* **39**, 541–574.
- Paik, Y. and R. L. Tung: 1999, 'Negotiating with East Asians: How to Attain "Win-win" Outcomes', *Management International Review* **39**(2), 103–122.
- Pan, Y.: 2000, 'Facework in Chinese Service Encounters', *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* **10**(1), 25–61.
- Searle, J. R.: 1969, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).
- Sheer, V. C. and L. Chen: 2003, 'Successful Sino-Western Business Negotiation: Participants' Accounts of National and Professional Cultures', *The Journal of Business Communication* **40**(1), 50–85.
- Shih, W. Y. C. (trans.): 1959, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. By Liu Xie. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Solomon, R.: 1992, 'Corporate Roles, Personal Virtues: An Aristotelean Approach to Business Ethics', *Business Ethics Quarterly* **2**(3), 317.
- Su, C. and J. E. Littlefield: 2001, 'Entering Guanxi: A Business Ethical Dilemma in Mainland China?', *Journal of Business Ethics* **33**, 199–210.
- Swales, J.: 1990, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).
- Ulijn, J., A. F. Rutkowski, R. Kumar and Y. Zhu: 2005, 'Patterns of Feelings in Face-to-Face Negotiation: A Sino-Dutch Pilot Study', *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal* **15**(3), 103–118.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (ed.): 1997a, *Discourse as Structure and Process* (Sage, London).
- Van Dijk, T. A. (ed.): 1997b, *Discourse as Social Interaction* (Sage, London).
- Whysall, P.: 2000, 'Marketing Ethics – An Overview', *The Marketing Review* **1**(2), 175–195.
- Wine, W. A.: 2008, 'Seven Pillars of Business Ethics: Toward a Comprehensive Framework', *Journal of Business Ethics* **79**, 483–499.
- Zhu, Y.: 1997, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Chinese Sales Letters', *Text* **17**(4), 543–566.
- Zhu, Y.: 2008, 'From Cultural Adaptation to Cross-Cultural Discursive Competence', *Discourse and Communication* **2**(2), 185–205.
- Zhu, Y. and P. Thompson: 2000, 'Invitation or Sexual Harassment? An Analysis of an Intercultural Communication Breakdown', *M/C – A Journal of Media and Culture* **3**(4), <http://www.media-culture.org.au/0008/invitation.html>
- Zhu, Y., B. McKenna and Z. Sun: 2007, 'Negotiating with the Chinese: Success of Initial Meetings is the Key', *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal* **14**(4), 354–364.
- Zhu, Y. and A. M. Zhang: 2007, 'Understanding Guanxi (connections) Through Business Leaders' Perspectives', *Business Communication Quarterly* **70**(3), 385–389.
- Zhuge, R. and X. Chen (eds.): 1994, *Duewai Maoyi Wenshu Xiezu (Practical Writings in Foreign Trade)* (Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, Beijing).

Business School, Faculty of Business, Economics and Law,
The University of Queensland,
Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia
E-mail: yzhu@business.uq.edu.au