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# THE SILENT CHINESE: THE INFLUENCE OF FACE AND *KIASUISM* ON STUDENT FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIORS

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Guard your mouth as though it were a vase, and guard your thoughts as you would a city wall.

—Chinese proverb (Ching, 1973)

There they sit, perhaps right in the front row, looking very attentive, making copious notes, but hardly saying a word. Chinese students may show interest in a subject and do well on tests and assignments in class, but they are often reluctant to speak up within the classroom environment. This could prove to be a challenge to any professor, especially one who has been used to teaching in a highly participative environment. Imagine yourself in a class of Chinese students. After every question you ask, there is a painful pause, and if you dare to call on a student, perhaps a timid answer will be forthcoming. What are the reasons for this silence? Is there a cultural explanation for the reluctance of Chinese students to participate in class? (Certainly, the Chinese proverb above suggests this to be a possibility.) What is the underlying

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dynamic that might explain this behavior? These questions have both frustrated and fascinated the authors and consequently prompted them to carry out this study.

Based on the authors' personal teaching experiences in both the Far East and the West, Chinese students are often more reluctant than their Western counterparts to raise questions or speak up in class. Dougherty and Wall's (1991) description of some of the challenges they faced in teaching students in China parallels our own experiences in many ways. With consistent findings in the organizational behavior literature that feedback seeking is vital for performance improvement (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Morrison & Bies, 1991), the unwillingness of Chinese students to seek feedback through questions is clearly of concern to educators.

#### ARE ALL CHINESE STUDENTS ALIKE?

Although the authors and others have experienced the "silent Chinese student" phenomenon (Dougherty & Wall, 1991; Yang, 1993), the question of the extent to which this phenomenon is common across all Chinese students raises the issue of similarities and differences between Chinese ethnic groups in different parts of the world. Certainly, all Chinese students are not alike. There are vast individual differences among Chinese students, and many of them would not be considered silent at all.

In addition to individual differences, cultural comparisons of Chinese people living in different countries indicate differences along various dimensions. If we consider societies that are predominantly Chinese—that is, the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—Hofstede's findings with respect to masculinity/femininity, power distance, and individualism/collectivism are fairly similar across these countries (Hofstede, 1980, 1993). However, these countries are also somewhat different, as Hong Kong and Singapore had very weak uncertainty avoidance scores, whereas China's score was moderate, and Taiwan's score was moderate to strong.

Over the past century, the movement and establishment of minority Chinese populations had happened primarily within Southeast Asian countries (Selmer, 1997). However, in the more recent two decades, emigrants coming out of Mainland China and Hong Kong have gone to countries in the West, such as North America, Europe, and Australia. With this movement toward more culturally distanced countries, the likelihood of greater cultural diversity among different Chinese ethnic groups in different locations should not come as a surprise. One possible consequence of this is that the influence of traditional Chinese philosophy and behavior on different Chinese ethnic

groups could vary according to location and factors such as country of birth, immigrant or native born status, and degree of assimilation into the host countries.

Although we recognize the influence of demographic, cultural, and other factors that could potentially affect the Chinese student, we chose to focus on Chinese students in only one society, Singapore, as a first step in our investigation of the silent Chinese student phenomenon. Our intention is to extend the study to include Chinese students who reside in other countries as we delve deeper into their learning behaviors and surrounding cultural context.

#### FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIOR IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Traditionally, researchers have directed their attention to feedback-seeking processes in the goal-oriented environment of business (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1983). This business focus has its roots in early attempts to understand corrective action processes and antecedent influences of feedback to meet organizational goal attainment needs (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Whereas earlier studies have concentrated on the rational motive of organizational goal attainment as the primary driver of feedback-seeking behaviors, more recent studies have called for the inclusion of other motives, especially those that involve the need to protect one's self-esteem (Ashford & Cummings, 1983) and manage one's impression before others (Morrison & Bies, 1991; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990): the "personal considerations" issue in feedback-seeking activities.

This research interest in goal orientation and "personal considerations" of feedback-seeking activities in the business arena should be extended to the learning environment. For example, students must interact with other students and the professor to achieve specific learning objectives, the equivalence of the goal orientation in the business world. Similarly, while participating in and outside of class, students would experience the same self-esteem needs and impression management concerns as do their counterparts in the business world. Thus, the learning environment may be more similar than different from the business world when examining feedback-seeking behaviors. In the area of questioning, the most obvious feedback-seeking behavior for students, educational researchers have long recognized the importance of feedback (Carner, 1963; Dillion, 1986; Gall, 1970). In general, student feedback-seeking behaviors are related to critical thinking (Smith, 1977), intellectual development (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), subject interest (Newcastle, 1970), and increased student learning motivation (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). From the educators' perspective, student feedback-seeking behaviors have enabled educators to reveal gaps in students' knowledge, clar-

ify student doubts, answer students' nagging questions, and confirm uncertain propositions (Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987). In sum, the benefits of having student questions are well recognized by educators, especially when we consider the extent of positive findings across educational grades, right up to the tertiary level.

Although much is known from educational research about the benefits of questioning behaviors and other classroom factors that influence learning processes in the Western classroom, little is known about possible cultural influences on such processes. The need to test for possible cultural influences is especially important when we are teaching in a cultural environment that is different from that in the West. For example, Chinese societies are generally considered more collectivistic in value orientation (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993) than many Western ones. This greater collectivism brings along with it different norms and expectations on acceptable social behaviors including those within the classroom.

When collectivism is high, conformance to socially expected behaviors is important for an individual's continued membership within that group. Failure to conform often results in negative sanctions on the deviant individuals (Yang, 1993). For example, in collectivistic cultures, conflict is commonly thought to be rooted in violations of cultural norms rather than differences in opinions between individuals (Gudykunst, Stewart, & Ting-Toomey, 1985). The consequent pressure on individuals to conform to accepted norms is seen in the family's or community's taking responsibility for such individuals and exerting influence on them, thus emphasizing the desire for harmony, unity, loyalty, and conformance (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). An individual who has been raised within this context would constantly consider how his or her behaviors (feedback-seeking behaviors included) might be viewed by his or her reference group.

In contrast, someone from an individualistic society would generally be less concerned with how others evaluated his or her personal behavior. As stated by Yang (1993) in his analysis of Chinese social orientation,

To avoid criticism, ridicule, rejection, or punishment (simply for having different opinions), and to win approval, acceptance or appreciation, they [the Chinese] need to make sure whether or not their own opinions, before being prematurely disclosed, are safely the same as those of others. (p. 44)

In the classroom, this concern may cause students to be unwilling to say anything for fear that their views may be unacceptable to other students or the teacher. Such "personal considerations" would clearly influence student feedback-seeking behaviors. Based on Yang's research of Chinese cultural

values and those of others (Bond & Lee, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 1994), we believe, therefore, that there is ground to argue for a strong influence of cultural factors on feedback-seeking behaviors among Chinese students.

Other than the influence of collectivism on individual expressions, Frijida and Mesquita (1994) also noted that respect for authority influences learning styles and behaviors of Asians. Whereas Asian societies, including those that are predominantly Chinese, give high priority to respect for authority, this may be less so in North America, Australia, and many parts of Europe. Hofstede (1980) found that Chinese societies, particularly Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, had large power distance scores, and he estimated that the same would be true in China as well (Hofstede, 1993). This high respect for authority may cause a Chinese student to consider raising questions before those in power (i.e., the instructor or professor) to be inappropriate because the act of questioning may imply a challenge to the knowledge and authority of the one in power. In contrast, such a notion would probably be less of an issue among students from many Western countries, where power distances are generally smaller (Hofstede, 1980).

Another cultural difference between Chinese and Westerners, in general, is the widely accepted and sanctioned norm of shame and embarrassment. Whereas such feelings are denied and deemed to be weak traits in the West (Harrington, 1992), they are taught as feelings that should be nurtured in Chinese societies. These feelings are important means through which the society socializes individuals to conform to cultural expectations. The way these feelings take form in the socialization process is through the Chinese value of *face*, the need to be respected by others and not be embarrassed in social interactions. This concern for face is an important influence on individual behaviors in Chinese societies (Bond & Lee, 1981; Earley, 1997; D.Y.F. Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Redding & Ng, 1982; Ting-Toomey, 1994). "The notion of face permeates every aspect of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture because of the culture's overarching relational orientation" (Gao, Ting-Toomey, & Gudykunst, 1996, p. 289).

Hu (1944) conceptualized face as having two aspects, *lian* (face) and *mianzi* (image). *Lian* is maintained by following societal norms, whereas *mianzi* is one's personal reputation that is derived from success. One should fear losing *lian* and do whatever is expected by society to keep *lian*. Through success in education or career, one could become recognized by others and acquire prestige, which leads to increased *mianzi*, a desirable state.

The notion of face is a concern not only of the individual but also of the individual's family. Thus, a student must avoid poor performance and/or personal embarrassment, as this creates not only a loss of individual face but also

a loss of family face (Stevenson & Lee, 1996). Therefore, the notion of face embodies within it a collectivistic dimension.

The pressure to maintain *lian* by conforming to social expectations and to increase *mianzi* through better education or career accomplishment has created a highly competitive spirit, especially in Asian societies. This competitive spirit has even been given a label: *kiasu*. The term *kiasu* originated in the Singapore context and reflects an obsessive concern with getting the most out of every transaction and a desire to get ahead of others. *Kiasu* means “afraid to lose” in the Chinese Hokkien dialect that is popular in Singapore. The Australian *Macquarie Dictionary* has defined *kiasuism* (a concocted noun of the adjective *kiasu*) as an obsessive desire for value for money hailed as a national fixation in Singapore. The extensiveness of this attitude among students is evidenced by the Report of the Advisory Council on Youths (1989), which concluded that the *kiasu* attitude underlies Singapore youths’ approach toward education, work, and other aspects of their lives.

A review of reports from the popular press in Singapore suggested two sides to the *kiasu* attitude. The first is a positive side, one that reveals itself through diligence and hard work by individuals to stay on top of the situation (Chua, 1989). For example, a positive *kiasu* attitude could lead students to put in extra effort into their work or to seek library resources beyond those required for class assignments.

The other side of *kiasuism* is negative and is revealed in personal envy and selfish behaviors (Kagda, 1993). An exploratory study to examine the nature of *kiasuism* among students (J.T.S. Ho, Ang, Loh, & Ng, 1998) showed that Singaporean students were significantly more likely than Australian students to rush for seats on trains and buses and reserve seats in the library for friends, at the expense of others. Also, it is interesting to note from this study that both Australian and Singapore students were just as *kiasu* (on an occasional basis) in rushing for store sales, piling up food and taking more expensive items at buffets, waiting early in line for tickets, hiding reference books on shelves so others could not get them, bringing back toiletries and utensils from hotels and airplanes, and elbowing their way into crowded elevators. Such *kiasu* attitudes have also been reported in Hong Kong (Foo, 1991). Thus, although the *kiasu* label has been coined in Singapore, as evidenced by the J.T.S. Ho et al. (1998) study and the Foo (1991) article, its presence in Singapore, Hong Kong, and even Australia—countries with different cultural profiles—raises questions on where else one might experience such an attitude.

Given this relatively new and emerging attitude in Singapore and the paucity of research into its nature, the authors felt that the best way to understand this attitude and its influence on student feedback-seeking behavior was,

first, to adopt a grounded study approach (Spradley, 1979)—a qualitative method that taps the richness of the indigenous people's perspective of this attitude—before trying to validate any emerging themes through formal hypotheses development and testing in a larger scale study. The adoption of a combined qualitative and quantitative approach has been recommended for studies where there is room for doubt on whether traditional assumptions of existing theory may be violated due to cultural differences or when the phenomena under study are just emerging and not at all clear (Reichardt & Cook, 1979).

### **Study 1: The Grounded, Qualitative Study**

As a first step in examining the classroom learning phenomenon in the Chinese context, we adopted Spradley's (1979) grounded approach for this part of the study. Such an approach does not impose any prior theoretical assumptions on the phenomenon under study but, rather, allows the phenomenon to speak for itself. This approach was preferred because (a) to the best of our knowledge, no feedback-seeking studies had been conducted in the Asian context, and (b) we suspected that differences between Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds could influence the motives and feedback-seeking behaviors that are important in the West.

#### **METHOD**

To begin the qualitative data gathering process, we developed a question protocol to help unearth the nature and meaning of feedback-seeking behaviors of students, especially their questioning behaviors in the classroom. Intensive one-to-one interviews were conducted by the first author with 11 students: 4 males and 7 females. All of the students were of Chinese origin but born in Singapore. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Interviews were taped and later transcribed for analysis.

In analyzing the transcribed notes, the approach taken by Colaizzi (1978) was used to reveal broad themes. First, all transcribed notes were read through by the first author for mind saturation. Second, key phrases or sentences pertaining to the questioning and answering phenomena were noted from the script and classified into broad themes. Third, the transcribed scripts together with the key phrases and sentences were given to the second author who independently reviewed and classified the statements into other broad themes. The first two authors then came together to discuss, review, modify, and recode statements, and finally to agree on a set of themes and their constituent statements.



## RESULTS

Seven relevant themes emerged from this qualitative analysis stage. The first three revolved around feedback-seeking behaviors: *InAsk*, asking questions in class; *OutCheck*, checking with other students outside of class; and *OutAsk*, seeking the professor's help after class. The next four themes were cultural-based, attitudinal themes: *kiasu-positive*, the desire to be diligent and hardworking; *kiasu-negative*, the desire to keep knowledge and advantages to oneself instead of sharing them with others; *face-gain*, the desire to gain honor and prestige before others; and *face-loss*, the fear of being embarrassed and shamed before others. Sample student interview responses that reflected these themes are shown below.

*InAsk*. This theme reflected students' motivation to raise questions in class. If they could not find satisfactory answers for their assignments and they thought that the professor or other students could help them, they might ask questions. Typical responses are shown below.

[In response to when a student would raise questions in class.] When you [meaning a student] are really confused and your friend couldn't give you a satisfactory answer that you think is reasonable . . . then you will turn to the tutor and ask him. (Student 1)

Some may think that maybe the question I am going to ask is irrelevant to the main question that is being discussed . . . so that may hold the person back from asking the question. (Student 3)

I will feel more free to ask questions if the class is more participative—they are more willing to contribute [answers]. . . . If you ask too many questions and it happens that the class is very quiet, you tend to be the outcast. . . . It's [class participation] very important. (Student 5)

*OutCheck*. Another feedback-seeking theme was checking with other students outside of class. Apart from asking questions in class, students also gather in informal groups to discuss issues on their minds. These informal discussions take place after class and provide an alternative feedback-seeking avenue. Some examples of responses are shown below.

Maybe the tutor never really answer[ed] the question properly and the class never really ask[ed] about it, then from there on, the question is skipped, then later on, we have a lot of confusion over it, then from there, after class. . . . Then we started asking our friend . . . is this the correct answer or . . . just now [what] the teacher [mentioned] is the correct one? You need a conclusion right? so you started calling your friend . . . say . . . hey . . . what's your answer . . . let me see your answer . . . compare answers. (Student 1)

When we are not very sure of the answer, and the tutorial class [didn't] really answer that question, then we come out of the class . . . get a few students to come together to check what the answer [should be]. (Student 2)

Most people would rather check with close friends rather than voice out . . . if we have subjective answers [different from others]. (Student 3)

*OutAsk.* The third feedback-seeking theme was asking questions outside of class. In their need for feedback from a more authoritative source than informal student groups, students sought out professors on a private basis to answer their questions. Typical responses are shown below.

We tend to find the tutor sometimes after the tutorial class, right? After the tutorial class when everybody is going off . . . then if there is something that you [a student] really don't understand, right? Then you may just approach the tutor after the tutorial class . . . but not during the class itself. (Student 1)

You only approach the tutor after class [to ask questions] . . . but keep quiet [in class]. (Student 8)

They will want to have private sessions with the tutor, and get more [information] from him. (Student 11)

*Kiasu-positive.* Students felt that most, if not everyone, exhibited some kiasu attitudes in their behaviors, attitudes that have been discussed in the popular press in Singapore (Yeo, 1995) and explored in the J.T.S. Ho et al. (1998) study.

There were two sides to kiasuism. The positive side (kiasu-positive) involved beliefs and behaviors that were consistent with the idea that diligence and extra effort would lead to success in life. Typical interview responses indicating this kiasu-positive attitude are given below.

[Kiasu people like to] get whatever notes [one] can get hold of—relevant or not relevant . . . buying all the exam papers from year to year even if [one] never studies [the examination papers] . . . for me I know that I buy the exam papers. (Student 8)

They [kiasu students] will be copying all the answers. . . . If not, they will be asking for photocopies after class. (Student 10)

Maybe they will try to get answers [to tutorial questions] from everywhere . . . from other classes . . . from other tutors . . . or they may want to have a private session with the tutor and get more [information] from him. (Student 11)

*Kiasu-negative.* The fifth theme was the opposite of the kiasu-positive attitude: the kiasu-negative attitude. In general, the kiasu-negative attitude

reflected a desire to keep material and knowledge to oneself so that other students would not benefit from them. In so doing, those with more material or knowledge would have an advantage over others. This kiasu-negative attitude was seen in these interview responses.

[Example of kiasu behavior is] Mug at home; study . . . study very hard at home, but come back to school and say never study . . . [giggle] . . . I think [this happens because] to some people, [this] probably makes the other person feel that [it's] OK, since the person didn't study, so I also won't study. . . . [The effect of this is] you will be ahead of other people because people think you didn't study but actually you studied and know your work. (Student 8)

It won't be so obvious. . . . People won't be like busy covering [their notes and answers]. . . . But if you ask them about something . . . they [may] blatantly tell you off. . . . They will tell you . . . the answer is very simple . . . just go look at your book and they won't show you their tutorial [answers] but just keep [their tutorial] to themselves. (Student 10)

[In response to a request from a fellow student for help.] They will say . . . I didn't write that down. (Student 11)

*Face-gain.* The final two themes were also based on cultural-specific values. Students expressed the need to manage their impressions and image in front of peers so that their peers would respect them. While part of this value could be traced to pressure from parents and their need for face, the students themselves also expressed personal need to have face (face-gain) before others. Typical responses reflecting this theme were

Famil[ies]—right now—are unlike [those] in the past. . . . A lot of parents [insist] that you must do well, must get honors [degree]. . . . They want their children to be better off than them, a bit of showing off . . . that kind of thing. . . . [Parents] compare their kids with those of other parents. . . . [They will think] my kids got honors [degree] and those of my friends only get a general degree or don't even get a degree. . . . And they'll go around bragging. . . . Basically it [pressure to do well arises from] whether you get honors [degree]. (Student 8)

You'll know, it's like . . . okay . . . like when you're with a close friend, you will tend to be more relaxed. You will clown around, you see. But when you are in a new group of friends you don't really know well, most probably you will carry yourself better. You tend to be more serious, don't let people think that "hey this person [is a] clown." (Student 3)

I think when you are in University, peer pressure will play a rather important part, rather than in primary school. Friends around you, how they perceive you as a person. . . . It's important to be well thought of in front of other people. (Student 9)

*Face-loss.* The last theme was the opposite of gaining face: losing face (face-loss). Expressions reflecting the concern for face-loss revolved around a deep need to avoid embarrassment in front of others. Such a need could be traced back to early socialization at home and in school. Some comments related to face-loss are given below.

[Fear of being embarrassed starts] from kindergarten or primary school. . . . Maybe not kindergarten, but primary school. It's like whenever you give the wrong answer, then . . . the rest of the class will start laughing or something like that. (Student 1)

They [fellow students] are afraid what they say may not be accepted by others. As a result, they may make a fool of themselves and others [may] look [disdainfully] at them. . . . I think so. (Student 2)

[There is a fear of] being the worst among your group of friends, like failing, not being able to get an honors [degree] . . . maybe just an ordinary degree. . . . I guess for every one of us here, all of us are aiming for honors [degree]. (Student 8)

## DISCUSSION

The qualitative study revealed a number of interesting factors that were related to feedback-seeking behaviors among these Chinese students. First, it appeared that feedback seeking occurred not only within classrooms but also outside of classrooms. Nearly all the students who were interviewed mentioned seeking feedback from fellow students before or after class, while some also mentioned that they sought feedback from professors on a private basis outside of formal class sessions. It was also interesting to note that the emerging feedback-seeking themes revolved around question-asking behaviors rather than both questioning and answering behaviors. This reveals what was prominent in the mind of students: raising questions, whether with their fellow students or professor, to get answers. Second, the recently identified cultural attitude of *kiasu* appeared to be a vital factor influencing feedback-seeking behaviors. The *kiasu*-positive attitude seems to encourage feedback-seeking behaviors, as these would enable *kiasu*-positive students to get ahead of others. On the other hand, some students stated that there were those who preferred private feedback-seeking sessions with professors for a *kiasu*-negative reason, the desire not to alert other students to possible questions that might uncover new knowledge. Not wanting others to know is an insidious *kiasu*-negative predisposition: an attitude to keep any acquired knowledge from others. Therefore, while a *kiasu*-positive attitude is likely to encourage feedback seeking from any source, the *kiasu*-negative attitude is likely to discourage open feedback seeking but instead encourage private

feedback-seeking behaviors. Consequently, feedback-seeking behaviors may be influenced in opposite directions by kiasu-positive and kiasu-negative attitudes, with the former more likely to lead to more feedback-seeking behaviors in class than the latter.

Third, it seemed that the kiasu attitudes could be traced to the Chinese concern with face: face-gain and face-loss. The interviews revealed that students' face-gain needs were related to their desire to get ahead of others (kiasu). For example, students who were concerned with gaining honor and respect before others would seek good grades or recognition by others. On the other hand, face-loss had to do with avoiding behaviors that could cause embarrassment or that might be deemed socially unacceptable. These would include asking questions that might make one "look stupid" before others or providing wrong answers in class. Clearly, students who wanted to be well thought of had to engage in both face management activities at the same time.

## **Study 2: The Quantitative Field Study**

Based on the interview findings and content analysis in the first study, a further examination of the literature on feedback-seeking and cross-cultural values in Asia was carried out. This led us to develop specific hypotheses that tested relationships among feedback-seeking, kiasu, and face constructs in this study. The first part of this second study will focus on the literature and hypotheses development before moving on to describe the sample, analysis approach, and final discussion of the findings.

### **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KIASU AND FEEDBACK-SEEKING BEHAVIORS**

From the results of Study 1, there were indications that both in-class and out-of-class feedback-seeking behaviors were affected by kiasu-positive and kiasu-negative attitudes. A kiasu-positive attitude appeared to promote diligent feedback-seeking behaviors, such as asking questions in class or seeking information outside of the classroom environment from two dominant sources: informal student groups and sessions with the professor.

However, some students also indicated that there were students who would rather ask professors questions privately so that they could keep the knowledge gained in these sessions to themselves. Apart from the desire to prevent others from knowing what one may gain, another reason for meeting the professor on a private basis could be the need to avoid embarrassment, a face to feedback-seeking influence. However, as we were primarily interested in the direct effects of kiasu attitudes on feedback-seeking behaviors,

we had deliberately left out direct face to feedback-seeking relationships in this initial model. More will be said about this later. With these considerations in mind, we hypothesized that whereas the kiasu-positive attitude would encourage participation both in and outside of class, the kiasu-negative attitude would encourage question-asking behavior outside of class with the professor but not in class or in student groups. Accordingly,

*Hypothesis 1:* Kiasu-negative is negatively related to InAsk.

*Hypothesis 2:* Kiasu-negative is negatively related to OutCheck.

*Hypothesis 3:* Kiasu-negative is positively related to OutAsk.

*Hypothesis 4:* Kiasu-positive is positively related to InAsk.

*Hypothesis 5:* Kiasu-positive is positively related to OutCheck.

*Hypothesis 6:* Kiasu-positive is positively related to OutAsk.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FACE AND KIASU

The two face constructs were treated as independent constructs in this model due to their longer Chinese cultural heritage when compared to the emergent kiasu attitudes. Face-gain has an external social focus that revolves around the need to attain respect and gain honor before others. Face-loss is broadly the reverse of face-gain and involves the idea of avoiding embarrassment and shame. Given the nature of the responses from the interviews, the conceptual distinction between *lian* and *mianzi* that has been argued by Hu (1944) was not clear. Therefore, these distinctions were not made in the construction of the face-gain and face-loss variables. Arising from the contrary nature of these two emerging face factors, both face factors should have opposite impact on the two different kiasu attitudes.

Specifically, face-loss, which has to do with avoiding embarrassment and shame, is hypothesized to be positively related to the kiasu-negative attitude. By keeping silent in class, the kiasu-negative person would prevent others from knowing what he or she knows and simultaneously reduce face-loss possibilities that might arise if he or she were to speak out and consequently make mistakes before others.

In contrast, the argument is for face-loss to be negatively related to the kiasu-positive attitude. This arises because a kiasu-positive attitude would push a student to seek feedback from any source to maximize the acquisition of desired knowledge, even if it meant appearing stupid before others. Anyone who is concerned with face-loss would clearly not be motivated to do so. Accordingly,

*Hypothesis 7:* Face-loss is positively related to kiasu-negative.

*Hypothesis 8:* Face-loss is negatively related to kiasu-positive.

The other face concept, face-gain, refers to the value of attaining respect and honor before others, a more proactive concern than face-loss. The opposite orientations of these two aspects of face—the former looking for increased respect and honor, the latter avoiding shame and embarrassment—are likely to affect in opposite ways on the two kiasu attitudes. Specifically, face-gain should be positively related to the kiasu-positive attitude, as relationships from kiasu-positive to feedback-seeking behaviors could provide the avenue for one to show one's prowess (face-gain) when participating in class and asking seemingly intelligent questions. In contrast, face-gain should be negatively related to the kiasu-negative attitude of nonsharing, as by keeping information to oneself (kiasu-negative attitude), a student also diminishes opportunities to show off knowledge and abilities (face-gain). Therefore,

*Hypothesis 9:* Face-gain is negatively related to kiasu-negative.

*Hypothesis 10:* Face-gain is positively related to kiasu-positive.

## Method

*Instrument development and pretesting.* Based on the results from the first qualitative study, we developed a 57-item scale to measure the seven constructs of interest. Each item was anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*all the time*) for items measuring frequency of reported behaviors and from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) for items measuring other responses.

The scale was pretested on a group of 72 undergraduate management students in a 2nd-year management and organizational behavior course at a Singapore university. The mean age of the students was 21.55 (ranging from 20 to 27). Females made up 77.8% of the sample, and the racial composition of the sample was 93.5% Chinese, 5.6% Malay, and 1.4% other. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for each construct scale to determine the reliability of the items. Unreliable items were then eliminated from each construct until there were only a maximum of three items per construct. The revised scale consisted of 21 items that reflected the seven constructs.

*Sample.* The revised instrument was administered on 503 undergraduate management students in a 1st-year management and organizational behavior course at the same Singapore university. From these 503 responses, listwise deletion eliminated 10 cases with incomplete responses, giving a sample size of 493. Of the remaining participants, more than 98% were Chinese, with the

rest Indian or Malay. Because the number of non-Chinese students in the sample was too small to analyze separately, these participants were also dropped from the sample. The final sample of 484 had a mean age of 20.18, with a range between 18 and 26. Slightly more than two thirds (68%) of the sample was female, which reflected the gender composition of the business and accountancy programs in which they were enrolled.

*Statistical analysis.* First, the collected data for the revised scale were factor analyzed through a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation to confirm the stability of the constructs. The factor loading results are presented in Table 1 along with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each scale. Both the factor loadings and the alpha coefficients indicated acceptable stability and consequent suitability of the factors for the next stage of analysis: hypothesis testing. The Lisrel 7 program (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989) was employed in building the initial face-kiasu-feedback-seeking model with each of the seven constructs identified through a fixed *I* value anchor on one of its items. The maximum likelihood method was adopted in testing the fit of the model.

## Results

### OVERALL FIT OF THE MODEL

This initial tested model is shown in Figure 1. High coefficients of determination were recorded for both *x* and *y* variables, thus indicating high reliability of construct items. The 15 items making up the five dependent constructs (kiasu-positive, kiasu-negative, InAsk, OutCheck, OutAsk) have *R*-squared values averaging approximately .7. The PSI coefficients ranged from .58 to .86, indicating good explanation of the dependent construct variance by the independent constructs. High *R*-squared values averaging approximately .6 were also observed for the independent constructs (face-gain and face-loss). The overall model fit the data well. This was indicated by the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of 0.92, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) of 0.90, and chi-square value of 458.75 with 179 degrees of freedom. Chi-square for independence model (*df* = 210) was 5850.35. The indices for the initial measurement model were chi-square = 643.53 (*df* = 189), GFI = 0.89, and AGFI = 0.86. These indices indicated reliable construct in the measurement model.



**TABLE 1**  
**Rotated Factor Loadings and Scale Cronbach's  $\alpha$**

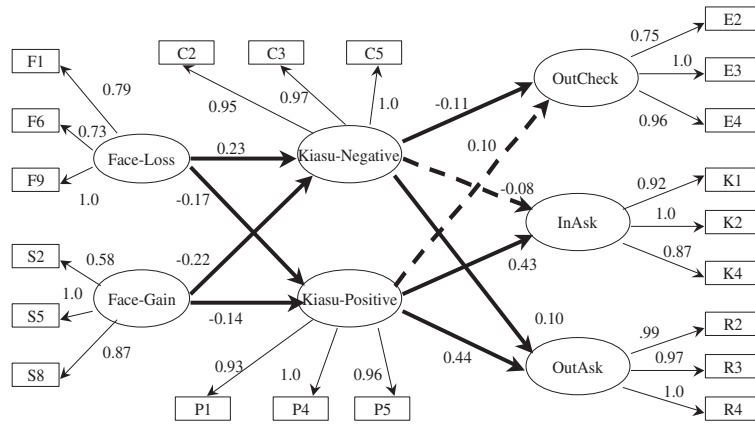
Scale Item	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Kiasu-negative ( $\alpha = .89$ )							
C2 I try not to let others know the right answers.	-.04	-.04	.89	.04	.12	-.10	.03
C3 I try not to let others have access to useful books and notes.	.01	-.04	.90	.04	-.01	-.10	.11
C5 I do not share useful knowledge with others.	-.04	-.03	.91	.07	.01	-.07	.11
OutCheck ( $\alpha = .89$ )							
E2 I meet my classmates after class to check on answers to questions that may be important for final examination.	.10	.84	-.01	.05	.03	-.01	.06
E3 I meet my classmates after class to check on answers to questions that tutors did not answer adequately.	.01	.93	-.05	.08	.01	.06	.05
E4 I meet my classmates after class to check on answers to confusing questions.	.00	.92	-.06	.06	.03	.04	.06
Face-loss ( $\alpha = .74$ )							
F1 I fear making mistakes in class.	-.29	.03	.06	.04	-.08	.08	.74
F6 Others take note of my mistakes.	.04	.15	.11	-.12	.03	.03	.78
F9 I fear others ridicule me.	-.08	-.01	.07	.05	-.09	.01	.85
InAsk ( $\alpha = .92$ )							
K1 I ask questions in class.	.88	.03	-.02	.21	.16	-.02	-.11
K2 I raise problems that I cannot resolve in class.	.91	.05	-.02	.19	.11	-.01	-.12
K4 I raise issues that are of concern to me in class.	.87	.06	-.04	.18	.17	.02	-.09
Kiasu-positive ( $\alpha = .85$ )							
P1 I read beyond my assigned readings.	.18	-.01	.04	.06	.86	-.01	-.07
P4 I supplement my knowledge with nonrequired course materials.	.11	.10	.05	.20	.85	-.10	-.09
P5 I do research on my coursework.	.13	-.01	.03	.23	.82	-.03	.01

*(continued)*

TABLE 1 Continued

Scale Item	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
OutAsk ( $\alpha = .87$ )							
R2 I check my tutorial answers with my tutor after class.	.18	.12	.04	<i>.85</i>	.18	.02	-.02
R3 I privately seek my tutor for solutions to questions.	.15	-.01	.08	<i>.86</i>	.11	-.03	-.02
R4 I raise my questions with my tutor after class.	.23	.11	.05	<i>.82</i>	.21	-.01	.01
Face-gain ( $\alpha = .74$ )							
S2 It is important for me to be thought of as a decent person.	-.06	.05	-.06	.09	-.19	<i>.68</i>	.11
S5 Above all, I want to be treated with respect.	.00	.01	-.09	-.07	.04	<i>.89</i>	.04
S8 Above all, I want to be treated with dignity.	.05	.02	-.10	-.04	.01	<i>.88</i>	-.03

NOTE: Key factor loadings are italicized for easy reading.



**Figure 1: Initial Face-Kiasu-Feedback-Seeking Model**

NOTE: Goodness-of-fit index = 0.92; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .90;  $N = 484$ ; all continuous arrows,  $t > 1.96$ ; dotted arrows,  $t > 1.65$ ; PSI ranged from .58 to .86.

**HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

All the hypothesized relationships among the constructs were significant. However, the face-gain to kiasu-positive relationship (Hypothesis 10) was in the opposite direction from what was originally hypothesized.

*Relationship between kiasu and feedback-seeking behaviors.* Kiasu-positive was significantly related to all the three feedback-seeking behaviors of InAsk ( $\beta = .43$ ), OutCheck ( $\beta = .10$ ) and OutAsk ( $\beta = .44$ ), therefore supporting Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6, respectively. Kiasu-negative was negatively related to InAsk ( $\beta = -.08$ ) and OutCheck ( $\beta = -.11$ ) but positively to OutAsk ( $\beta = .10$ ). Accordingly, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were supported.

*Relationship between face and kiasu.* Face-loss was significantly and positively related to kiasu-negative ( $\gamma = .23$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was supported. In addition to its relationship with kiasu-negative, face-loss showed a negative relationship with kiasu-positive ( $\gamma = -.17$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 8 was also supported.

When we observed the relationship between face-gain and kiasu-negative, we found face-gain to be negatively related to the kiasu-negative attitude ( $\gamma = -.22$ ), therefore supporting Hypothesis 9. However, although face-gain did have a significant relationship with the kiasu-positive attitude of putting in extra effort, the relationship was negative ( $\gamma = -.14$ ). This was contrary to our hypothesis (Hypothesis 10).

*Further exploratory analysis and revised model.* To further explore the interconstruct relationships, we reviewed the Lisrel Modification Indices for any suggested relationships that were not revealed in the interview data. The indices suggested a strong InAsk to OutAsk relationship (modification index of 56.36). There were also indications of possible direct relationships from the two face constructs to the feedback-seeking constructs, although at a much lower level (modification indices were between 4.25 and 16.12). Although we were conscious of the necessity to anchor our research efforts in theory and proper hypothesis development and testing, we were open to the possibility of logical construct relationships that existed in the data but that we, nevertheless, had not considered in our hypothesis development process. This is where strict hypothesis testing would have to be relaxed to allow us to move onto the next level of exploration: possible emerging and logical relationships.

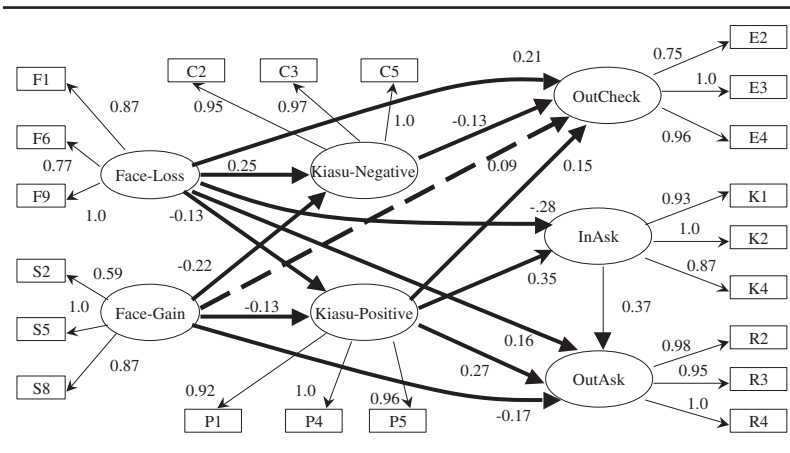
First, the indicated relationship from InAsk to OutAsk seems reasonable as both are feedback-seeking behaviors that are directed at the professor; therefore, there was a reason for them to be related to each other. The only difference is that one is an in-class behavior (InAsk) and the other out-of-class behavior (OutAsk). This relationship seemed plausible, and subsequent informal discussions with 3 of the 11 students who participated in the qualitative study indicated that those who asked questions in class were also likely to be those who were not afraid of being seen as asking "stupid questions" before their professors, even after class.

In addition, it seemed logical to free relationships from the two face constructs onto the feedback-seeking constructs because educational research had already shown students to be reluctant to participate in class for fear of embarrassment (Good et al., 1987).

Figure 2 shows the alternative model after removal of nonsignificant test relationships, and adding Lisrel indicated new relationships. This alternative model revealed a slight improvement in model fit, with GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.91, and chi-square = 356.37 with 175 degrees of freedom (see Figure 2).

In this alternative model, kiasu-negative had a negative relationship with OutCheck ( $\beta = -.11$ ), but its relationships with InAsk and OutAsk in the initial model (see Figure 1) were no longer significant. On the other hand, kiasu-positive maintained its sizable significant relationships with OutCheck ( $\beta = .15$ ), InAsk ( $\beta = .35$ ), and OutAsk ( $\beta = .27$ ). The newly added InAsk to OutAsk relationship was significant ( $\beta = .37$ ). This confirmed the close relationship between these two constructs.

All the three face-loss to feedback-seeking relationships were significant: OutCheck ( $\gamma = .21$ ), InAsk ( $\gamma = -.28$ ; note negative relationship), and OutAsk ( $\gamma = .16$ ). Face-gain significantly predicted OutCheck ( $\gamma = .09$ ) and OutAsk



**Figure 2: Alternative Face-Kiasu-Feedback-Seeking Model**  
 NOTE: Goodness-of-fit index = 0.93; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .91;  $N = 484$ ; all continuous arrows,  $t > 1.96$ ; dotted arrows,  $t > 1.65$ ; PSI ranged from .50 to .83.

( $\gamma = -.17$ ; note negative relationship) but not InAsk. All the remaining relationships that were tested in the initial model (see Figure 1) remained significant, although there were slight changes in their gamma and beta coefficients.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### MAJOR FINDINGS

*Nature of feedback seeking in a learning environment.* This study has revealed and validated three important feedback-seeking options in the Chinese learning context: seeking feedback in the formal classroom environment (InAsk), checking with other students outside of the formal classroom environment (OutCheck), and seeking feedback from the professor outside of the formal classroom environment (OutAsk). Prior studies have emphasized the importance of question-asking behavior in class and shown its relationship with critical thinking, intellectual development, learning motivation, and using active learning strategies (Belensky et al., 1986; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Smith, 1977). The results of this study clearly showed that in addition to the traditional in-class question-asking avenue, there are also at least two other feedback-seeking avenues to meet student needs. The availability of these two other avenues confirmed our suspicions that silent students have alternative means to in-class feedback-seeking options. Therefore, while professors should certainly encourage question asking in class,

informal after-class feedback seeking with the professor in private or with other students should also be considered as two useful avenues for students. The strong relationship between InAsk and OutAsk in the alternative model (see Figure 2) suggests that if the professor can get students to meet privately outside of class to ask questions, this could have some positive influence on their question-asking behaviors in class. To achieve this, the professor could encourage quiet students to meet with him or her outside of class, which hopefully would lead to increased participation in class over time.

*Kiasuism and its relation to feedback seeking.* Overall, relationships from the kiasu-positive and kiasu-negative attitudes to feedback-seeking behaviors (InAsk, OutCheck, and OutAsk) revealed interesting findings. First, a kiasu-positive attitude led to greater feedback seeking in class and with the professor in private sessions. Its influence on seeking feedback from other students after class was weak and bordering on nonsignificance (see Figure 1). However, when direct face to feedback-seeking relationships were allowed in the alternative model (see Figure 2), this relationship improved ( $t > 1.96$ ,  $\beta = .15$ ).

In contrast to the positive influence of kiasu-positive on feedback-seeking behaviors, the self-centered kiasu-negative attitude was negatively related to feedback seeking in class and with other students outside of class (see Figure 1). This suggested that students with kiasu-negative attitudes would be less likely to participate in feedback-seeking behaviors than those with kiasu-positive attitudes. Second, although the self-centered kiasu-negative attitude clearly discouraged sharing information with others, it nevertheless encouraged feedback seeking from the professor in private (see Figure 1). This was not unexpected as we now understand a student with such an attitude would not want to share knowledge with others nor risk possibly appearing stupid before them.

Whereas the positive side of the kiasu attitude focuses on putting in extra feedback-seeking effort to acquire knowledge and consequently get ahead of others, the negative side focuses on keeping things to oneself so that others will not benefit from what one knows. The results point to the important role played by kiasu-positive in contrast to kiasu-negative on in-class feedback-seeking behaviors and with the professor in private.

*Face and its relation with kiasuism.* In our attempts to trace the possible cultural roots of kiasu attitudes, we were led to Chinese cultural values of face-loss and face-gain. Specifically, the kiasu-negative attitude was positively related to face-loss and negatively to face-gain. The positive relationship between kiasu-negative and face-loss was expected because students

who were afraid of losing face would keep knowledge to themselves for fear of looking foolish if their questions revealed their ignorance in class. The negative relationship from kiasu-negative to face-gain was also expected because students who wish to gain the respect of others would prefer to express themselves to demonstrate their prowess (face-gain) through intelligent questions, instead of keeping knowledge (kiasu-negative) to themselves.

Also, as predicted, the kiasu-positive attitude was negatively related to face-loss. This relationship implied that a kiasu-positive student is not afraid of embarrassment before others when seeking out needed information. In other words, the desire to find answers to get ahead of others overrides the fear of embarrassment.

However, the expected kiasu-positive to face-gain relationship did not materialize. Instead, there was a significant negative relationship between kiasu-positive and face-gain. Because the face constructs were considered to underlie the kiasu attitudes, what could this mean? One possible explanation that those who are concerned about looking good in front of others (face-gain) would likely be too caught up with others' opinions of them and, as a result, would not dare take the risk of going all out (kiasu-positive) to raise questions in their minds. This would fit in with the argument that in a highly collectivistic society, it is important to do what is expected and to conform to group norms of social behaviors. Specifically, by being too aggressive in trying to get ahead (kiasu-positive), one may stick out before others and consequently incur the ire of others. The conclusion is that if one desires to gain face before others, one should not exhibit too aggressively kiasu-positive behaviors before them. Another way to look at this is that those working hard to get ahead (kiasu-positive) are not concerned with looking good in front of others (face-gain), or they do not have enough time and energy to worry about how they look in front of others, thus the negative relationship between kiasu-positive and face-gain.

The influence of face on kiasu attitudes and consequent student feedback behaviors agrees with other research findings that call attention to the importance of "personal considerations" in examining feedback-seeking behaviors (Ashford & Cummings, 1983; Morrison & Bies, 1991; Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). Such personal considerations need not necessarily be restricted to the business context but, as is shown here, are also present in the general learning environment. The importance of personal considerations in this study was traced to the cultural roots of face, which has wide ranging ramifications for all aspects of social life and feedback-dependent situations in Chinese societies. The indicated relationships from face to kiasu and consequent feedback-seeking behaviors show that deeply rooted Chinese values of

shame and embarrassment (Bond & Lee, 1981; Harrington, 1992; Redding & Ng, 1982) do have behavioral impact and, in this case, on important feedback-seeking behaviors in the learning situation.

Some may raise the question of how an attitude such as kiasuism, which seems to be an individualistic orientation, could develop in a collectivistic society such as Singapore. Perhaps a particular facet of collectivism, Triandis's (1995) concepts of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism could provide an explanation here. Because Triandis's vertical facet of collectivism is roughly equivalent to Hofstede's (1980) concept of power distance (which is large for Singapore), the emergence of kiasu that we see here could be construed as one form of this vertical collectivistic orientation. This would therefore explain the competitive behaviors that accompany the kiasu attitude in Singapore, despite the society's underlying collectivistic value.

In the alternative model (see Figure 2), the negative relationship from face-loss to InAsk when contrasted against its two positive relationships to OutCheck and OutAsk were intuitively logical. In other words, those who were afraid of losing face before others would naturally want to avoid asking questions in class for fear of appearing ignorant before their fellow students but, at the same time, after class would seek out the professor or a smaller group of students to address their needs for information. These relationships are consistent with general educational research findings on students' desires to avoid embarrassment in class (Good et al., 1987).

It is also interesting to note that the face-gain to OutCheck relationship was positive and marginally significant ( $\beta = .09$ ) while its relationship with OutAsk was clearly negative ( $\beta = -.17$ ). There was no significant relationship with InAsk. This would suggest that those who desire recognition and honor before others would seek to do so through their peers, as exemplified by the positive face-gain to OutCheck relationship, albeit a moderate one. The lack of relationship from face-gain to InAsk and negative relationship to OutAsk showed that students seeking recognition probably would not find it in their interactions with their professor. This is logical because the professor should know more than the students and therefore would be harder to impress than fellow students.

One noteworthy point is the predominance of female students in the sample (68%). We did further testing by analyzing the data by gender. In the female sample ( $n = 331$ , GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.91), kiasu-positive positively predicted InAsk ( $\beta = .37$ ) and OutAsk ( $t = 4.45$ ) but not OutCheck. Kiasu-negative marginally predicted OutAsk ( $\beta = .10$ ) but nothing else. The InAsk to OutAsk relationship continued to exist ( $\beta = .26$ ). On the independent construct end, face-gain, as expected, negatively predicted kiasu-negative ( $\gamma =$



-.21) and OutAsk ( $\gamma = -.20$ ). There were no other significant face-gain relationships. Also as expected, face-loss negatively predicted InAsk ( $\gamma = -.42$ ) and positively predicted kiasu-negative ( $\gamma = .27$ ). Although the significant relationships were similar to those in the total sample, it was the lack of significance among other tested relationships when compared against those in the alternative model (see Figure 2) that is revealing of the female subsample. More specifically, female students who were afraid of face-loss would definitely not participate in InAsk and showed no particular inclination toward engaging or not engaging in OutAsk or OutCheck. This is in contrast to the positive relationship from face-loss to OutAsk and OutCheck in the alternative model (see Figure 2). Therefore, it seems that female students who were afraid of losing face were either much more reluctant or, at best, ambivalent toward feedback-seeking behaviors when compared against results from the overall sample.

In the male subsample, the overall fit was lower because of the much smaller sample size ( $n = 157$ , GFI = 0.85, AGFI = 0.81). Kiasu-positive strongly predicted all the three feedback-seeking behaviors of OutCheck ( $\beta = .21$ ), InAsk ( $\beta = .36$ ), and OutAsk ( $\beta = .28$ ). Kiasu-negative only predicted OutCheck in the negative direction ( $\beta = -.26$ ) and nothing else, whereas the InAsk to OutAsk relationship remained significant ( $\beta = .37$ ). On the independent construct end, face-gain did not have any significant relationship with other dependent constructs, whereas face-loss positively predicted OutCheck ( $\gamma = .30$ ) and OutAsk ( $\gamma = .24$ ). Face-loss also positively predicted kiasu-negative ( $\gamma = .18$ ) and negatively predicted kiasu-positive ( $\gamma = -.18$ ). These relationships suggest that male students were much more driven by face-loss concerns than the desire to gain face in seeking feedback from others.

*Implications.* What then are the teaching implications of these findings? First and foremost, the high values on both collectivism and face in Singapore (Hofstede, 1980) and, in general, among Chinese ethnic groups (Bond & Lee, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 1994) implies that if any learning is to take place through feedback-seeking behaviors, the barriers to feedback seeking that arise from face concerns would have to be addressed by the professor. As was shown in the overall sample (see Figure 2), face-gain desires do not facilitate feedback seeking, but instead, it was fear of face-loss that led students to seek out the professor on a private basis for answers to questions they did not want to raise in class for fear of losing face.

Also, it was interesting to note that both face-gain and face-loss pressures led students to seek feedback among their friends outside of the classroom environment. However, the motives are probably different for those with pri-

marily face-gain versus those with primarily face-loss concerns. Those desiring to gain face before others would lean toward using fellow students as the source for recognition and respect during feedback-seeking activities. However, the motive for those fearing loss of face would be to obtain information that they did not manage to get hold of in class. The relationships from face to kiasu were generally as expected, apart from the negative face-gain to kiasu-positive relationship. Results from both the initial (see Figure 1) and alternative (see Figure 2) models indicate that if kiasu-negative is to be discouraged, effort must be made to reduce concern for face-loss. In contrast, kiasu-positive would be reduced if face-gain or face-loss concerns became nonissues because kiasu-positive is negatively related to both types of face concerns.

Apart from our study, the importance of face has also been reported for other groups of Chinese students. As was pointed out by Dougherty and Wall (1991), their experience with Chinese students in China revealed student sensitivity to feedback from professors. At the same time, these students worked very hard to avoid failure and the consequent loss of face. One of Dougherty and Wall's suggestions for improving learning interactions with Chinese students was to make an effort to adapt to the Chinese culture, for example, trying out the Chinese language or telling stories about oneself to personalize the interactions. Another option was to use groups to facilitate the learning process.

Their experience was that Chinese students tended to respond much better to group activities, such as case studies or problem solving processes, when compared with interactions at the classroom level. This may have arisen because interactions in small groups provide lower risk of face loss when compared with the risk of individual participation in a large class setting. In such a small group setting, questions that may reflect one's ignorance and that would not have been asked at the class level are more likely to be raised.

The "Vote with their Feet" technique suggested by Holmes (1997) may also encourage Chinese students to participate in class. Holmes encouraged student participation by structuring a debate in which students were asked to physically move to a certain area in the classroom to signify their vote on the issue in question. After the vote, there would be a debate between or among groups that voted differently from each other. A variation of this technique is to have students discuss the issues in small groups before the debate begins. This may be more effective with Chinese students. Through such informal discussions, students could test out their opinions in a smaller and less public forum. Those who finally speak from the groups could then be seen as representing a group's opinion, a position that might be more comfortable for students who are concerned with acceptance from relevant others.

For those who have to deal with a small class but without the physical space to do group work, the first author has tried a simple intervention in classes of up to about 20 students. This involves first writing the names of students on the whiteboard during each class session. Then, whenever a student asks a question or provides a response, a small smiley-face is drawn next to the name of the student. The higher the participation level of the student, the more smiley-faces would be recorded against the name of that student. This visual record worked well in increasing participation. First, students who did not participate in class would begin to feel very uncomfortable as they had no smiley-faces recorded against their names, and it was for everyone to see. As a result, pressure would arise from within themselves to participate in class so as not to be left out of the group. And everyone gave in to the pressure after a while! What is happening here is that the collectivistic value of conforming to group norms, or to behave in a way that is similar to the rest of the group, has been used to highlight their nonparticipation in contrast to the participation of others in the class. The second way smiley-face works is as a deterrent against those who are prone to dominate the class session. When the string of smiley-faces begins to accumulate against certain individuals' names, these individuals begin to feel uncomfortable, as they appeared to stand out from the rest of the class. Consequently, they would moderate their participation level. The same principle of using these students' underlying collectivistic value orientation to increase the participation level of the quiet ones has also worked in reverse to moderate domination of the session by others. While groups and smiley-face provide useful facilitating as well as containment mechanisms for student interactions, they are nevertheless surface-level interventions. Their ability to improve the learning process does not address the deeper level attitudinal roots: the deep-seated cultural norms and attitudes that hinder or enhance feedback-seeking behaviors. One possible deeper level intervention may be the use of T-groups in class. Schor and Sabiers (1995) reviewed the current practice of using T-group sessions in American business schools and pointed to the benefits of such programs for student learning and growth: "Our colleagues describe their pleasure at seeing students take risks, confront emotional issues that have been troublesome for them, and experience the impact of their behaviors on others" (p. 535). However, they also discussed the efforts and the emotional loads that are placed on group facilitators of such programs.

The resurgence of T-groups in the United States after a lull in the 1970s and 1980s is an encouraging development for student personal awareness and growth. Unfortunately, the T-group movement is still, to a large degree, foreign in the Asian classroom. The strong concern for face among Chinese ethnic groups is a natural barrier to the underlying philosophy of T-groups, one

that requires revealing the depths of oneself—both positive and negative—before others.

The use of such deep-level intervention can only succeed with patience and over a long period of time, time to allow change to take place in such deep-seated attitudes (Campbell & Dunnette, 1968). Nevertheless, if this can be done, it will be a breakthrough in helping students become less concerned with their self-needs while participating in addressing the needs of others and, thus, share in the wider common humanity.

#### LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to have examined the Chinese cultural influence of face and kiasuism on feedback-seeking behaviors. There is still much to learn about the cultural roots of these attitudes and values in the Chinese tradition. Although we now know that a kiasu-positive student is one who is likely to seek feedback both in and outside of class, we do not know other conditional requirements for these values, attitudes, and consequent behaviors to take place. For example, would the relationship between kiasu and feedback-seeking behavior change depending on the individual's goal of seeking feedback (long-term personal development versus short-term examination purposes)? What is the threshold at which students would deem it necessary to seek feedback and raise questions, even at the risk of embarrassment in class? Is there a different threshold for seeking feedback outside of class? How could professors capitalize on these thresholds to further the learning process? Is kiasuism a culture-bound or global phenomenon? Knowing the answers to these questions would help educators develop strategies to structure the formal and informal class settings so that students could best acquire the desired knowledge and skills.

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