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# JAPANESE FOLK CONCEPT OF MENTSU: AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chun-Chi Lin & Susumu Yamaguchi

## INTRODUCTION

Individuals are concerned about their public image, which is represented as *face* (Goffman, 1967). Despite the popularity of the face concept in the literature, controversies remain about its characteristics and the roles it plays in everyday life, especially in Japanese culture, due to the lack of a consistent and clear definition as well as empirical evidence. *Mentsu* is an indigenous face concept in Japanese culture, which refers to individuals' social image of the extent to which they fulfill their ascribed social role(s) (the term social role here is used broadly which also include the gender role). Even though previous researchers have pointed out the importance of *mentsu* as a key concept to discuss Japanese people and Japanese society (e.g., Lebra, 1976), *mentsu* has been largely neglected in the literature recently (Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1993). In addition, even when *mentsu* was exceptionally discussed, the analysis of *mentsu* seems to be limited in theoretical speculations or it is used just as the Japanese translation of the English face concept<sup>1</sup>, despite the inherent differences between these two terms (e.g., Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1993). Therefore, little has been known about antecedents and consequences of *mentsu* so far. Our own research on Japanese face, or *mentsu*, has revealed the importance of social role for Japanese face: Japanese face refers to *one's public image that a person fulfils his or her social role as expected by others*. Thus, Japanese lose face when they find themselves failing to meet those expectations. Comparison between Japanese face concept with the English and the Chinese face concepts revealed that there are both universal (*etic*) characteristics and culturally unique (*emic*) components. Finally, we suggest that some situational factors (e.g., formality of situations, hierarchical relationships, and so on) affect Japanese perception of face. Implications for future research are discussed.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON FACE

The word face<sup>2</sup>, other than its original meaning that refers to the part of human's physical body, is also used as a metaphor of people's public image. This usage of face is Chinese in origin: face has been used as an everyday concept since the fourth century B.C. (Hu, 1944). In Chinese culture, two kinds of face are distinguished: (1) *mien-tzu* (面子), which is similar to social prestige, "a reputation achieved through getting on in

life, through success and ostentation” (Hu, 1944), and (2) *lien* (臉), which refers to a person’s basic moral worth. Chinese face represents people’s concerns about their social reputations. It suggests that whereas *mien-tzu* can be achieved by having wealth or power, *lien* is ascribed for all persons. For example, one can maintain or enhance one’s *mien-tzu* by making a lot of money to build a mansion, whereas *lien* can be maintained by donating the money for the devastated people. Further, because all persons are supposed to have *lien*, *mien-tzu* and *lien* can be possessed by one person at the same time, depending on whether he or she follows the standards of morality (Leung & Inoue, 2003). For example, a rich man who makes dirty money is supposed to have *mien-tzu* because he is rich, but he would not have *lien* because he earned the money illegally.

Goffman’s work on Western face, not surprisingly, was influenced by the Chinese face concept as he acknowledges (Goffman, 1967). He defined the concept of face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman, 1967, pp.5). According to Goffman, a line means “a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself”. He also suggests that face can be lost, saved, or given. Individuals would experience an emotional response to the loss or maintenance of face when they interact with others, especially when they feel an attachment to a particular face. Further, he divided the focus of face into two kinds: self-face, which refers to one’s own face, and other-face, which refers to others’ face. Not only do people care about their own face, but also often give considerations to other’s face in the interaction. As a result, people in interactions often maintain the face of each other, resulting in face maintenance of all parties involved.

Following Goffman (1955, 1967), Brown and Levinson (1978) conceptualized face as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. They proposed two types of face needs, negative and positive face needs, as the two fundamental motivations underlying individuals’ face concerns. According to Brown and Levinson, negative face needs are individuals’ desires to be free of imposition and restraints from the social environment, to have control over their own time, space, and resources. On the other hand, positive face needs are the desires to possess the attributes or qualities that are valued and approved by other people. Lim and Bowers (1991) and Lim (1994) further divided positive face needs into two types, resulting in three distinct types of face: (1) autonomy-face, which is individuals’ social image that they are in control of themselves, motivated by the need not to be imposed, (2) fellowship-face, which is individuals’ social image that they are worthy companion, motivated by the need to be included, and (3) competence-face, which is the social image that one is competent and intelligent, motivated by the need that his or her abilities be respected (Lim, 1994).

## Two Approaches to the Face Concept

Current studies concerning the face concept can be divided into two main categories: one is sociolinguistic approach and the other one is communication approach. The sociolinguistic approach is based on Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory. For this reason, this approach is also called ‘politeness-theory approach’ (Tracy, 1990). Politeness theory argues that every speech act, which refers to the function or the action performed by a particular utterance, has its potential threats not only to the recipient or the listener but also to the sender or the speaker. For instance, a request would threaten

the recipient's negative face need (i.e., desire not to be imposed) whereas a request would also threaten the sender's positive face need (i.e., desire to be a person of ability). Furthermore, the theory suggests that the extent to which the speech acts threaten face is influenced by three situational factors: the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the relative power of the speaker over the listener, and the intrinsic degree of face threat an act has.

For years, researchers have tried to confirm the validity of the politeness theory in their own language as well as to compare the differences in linguistic use of politeness across cultures (e.g., Matsumoto, 1988; Mao, 1994). Quite ironically, however, these investigations resulted in questioning the universality of politeness theory as Brown and Levinson (1978) proposed. First, the politeness principles were found unable to explain people's language usage well, particularly those languages with honorifics such as Japanese (e.g., Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994). Ide (1989) argued that two important aspects of language and usage are neglected for the politeness principles to explain the linguistic politeness in Japanese. According to Ide, one neglected aspect is the linguistic choice of formal forms from varieties of different degrees of formality, and the other aspect is the speaker's use of polite expression that is determined by the social conventions rather than individuals' interactional strategy. Therefore, a more comprehensive framework which can explain the universality of linguistic politeness is needed (Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988).

Second, most of the criticisms against Brown and Levinson's politeness theory are targeted at the assumption of the negative face need. Negative face, which represents the claim for personal territories and not being imposed, actually sounds like an odd thing for individuals from a culture in which social relationships and interdependence are valued (e.g., Matsumoto, 1988; Mao, 1994). Even though the phenomenon described as negative face can sometimes be found in Japanese interactions (e.g., a wife's patience with her husband's overdrinking or the parents' tolerance for the child's wild clothing), it is not the dominant face in Japanese culture. People would not even describe it as a face. Rather, they would use other phrases, such as "tolerance" or "patience" as we wrote in the above parenthesis. In addition, the theory is criticized for the three situational factors being culturally biased (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987). For instance, some speech acts may be considered more threatening in culture A than in the other cultures (e.g., Tracy, 1990). Let's take an example of a quite common greeting (at least in Japan), which people may make when they happen to see an acquaintance on the street. After saying "Hi" to each other, Japanese people would ask their acquaintance where he or she is going to. Most likely, being asked this question by an acquaintance, Japanese would take it as a polite greeting. In contrast, for North Americans, being asked where to go may be an imposition and work as a threat to their negative face need. Therefore, even the same behavior can be interpreted differently in different cultures in terms of the degree of threat to face. Finally, the situational factors may not be limited to three (i.e., intimacy, power-distance and the degree of threat that the speech act causes). It would be quite plausible that other kinds of factors, such as the hierarchical relationship, social obligations and so on, would also affect the politeness of expressions.

In contrast to the sociolinguistic approach which emphasizes the politeness phenomena in linguistic usage, the communication approach pays more attentions to interpersonal or cross-cultural conflicts. For example, face negotiation theory (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1998; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003) applies the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism and self-construal to explain the differences in the target of

face concerns and conflict resolution styles across cultures. It is argued that during conflict management, people from individualistic cultures tend to emphasize self-face over other-face or mutual face (i.e., the concern for both parties' image or the image of their relationship), whereas people from collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize other-face or mutual face over self-face. This tendency is mediated by individuals' self-construal, according to this approach.

### Some Remaining Issues

No doubt previous researches have made their own contributions to the understanding of the face concept. Nevertheless, there are remaining issues that require empirical research. In the following, we will delineate some of those issues.

First, the definition of the face concept remains inconsistent and it does not fit cultures like Japan. Goffman (1967)'s definition of face, "positive social value a person claims for himself by the line other assume he has taken during a particular contact", stresses the social relational characteristic of face, whereas Brown and Levinson (1978)'s definition, "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself", seems to emphasize the individualistic aspects of face (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). In addition, we found that there is no one definition which is comprehensive enough to include face concepts in cultures other than North America. Brown and Levinson's definition of face cannot explain the Chinese *mien-tzu / lien* or the Japanese *mentsu*, both of which stress the communal aspect of face and the perspectives from others (e.g., Mao, 1994). Thus, even though we acknowledge Goffman's pioneering work on face in our every day life with emphasis on the relational features of face, we would argue that there remains room for further conceptual clarification and theoretical supplements so that we are able to capture the different nuances of face orientation in different cultures.

Here, we would suggest that while sharing the essential characteristic of face, each cultural face concept may have its salient or dominant component reflecting cultural uniqueness. As shown in Table 1, we suggest that the universal (*etic*) component of face concepts across cultures is that face represents individuals' public or social images. The other components appear to be culture specific (*emic*). For example, we suggest that the face<sup>1</sup> concept in English is characterized by its emphasis on the negative face, which represents the social images of independence and territory. On the other hand, the Chinese face concept, *lien*, is characterized by the emphasis on the individuals' morality. The idea of cultural uniqueness of face concept does not imply the absence of such characteristics in other cultures. Rather, we argue that it is a matter of dominancy. Only through the indigenous approach can we unravel cultural unique components of the face concept.

**Table 1**  
**Common and Unique Components of Face**

Components	Characteristics
Etic	Individuals' public image
Emic	[China] <i>Mien-tzu</i> emphasizes individuals' power. <i>Lien</i> emphasizes individuals' morality.
	[Japan] <i>Mentsu</i> emphasizes individuals' fulfillment of their social role or social position.
	[West] <i>Negative face</i> emphasizes individuals' freedom and personal territory.

Second, little has been known about face due to the lack of empirical research in the East as well as in the West. Previous research tended to rely on conceptual analysis and intuitive reasoning. Therefore, theories advanced in the previous research have not been subjected to empirical scrutiny. Thus, later in this article, we would propose an empirically based elaboration of the face concept in Japanese cultural context.

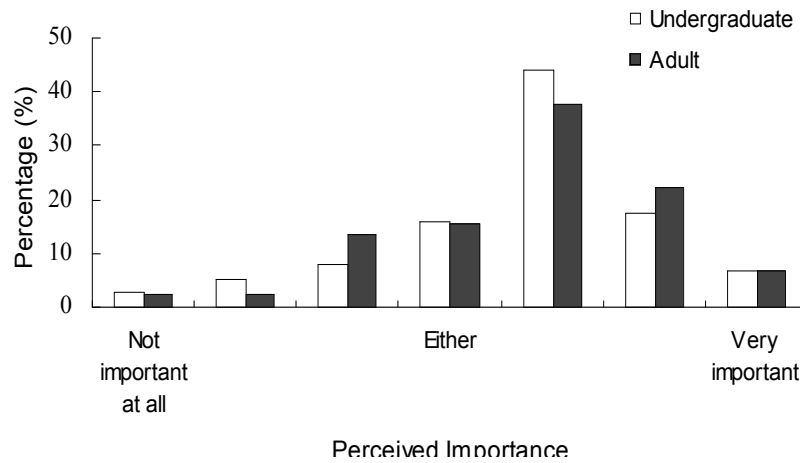
Last but not least important, we would like to point out that social psychological implications of face for people's everyday life has been largely left unanswered. For this reason, we will pay attention to possible impacts of face experiences not only on people's social behaviors but also their cognitive and emotional consequences. For example, any face-related events can be considered a potential threat to individuals' face. Thus, it is plausible that the face-related experience can cause psychological tensions in people. Do these tensions result in positive emotions or negative emotions? Or are these tensions in more of a mixed form of positive and negative emotions? Would the maintenance of face buffer these tensions? Are there any individual differences which moderate these tensions? And so on. These important research questions are left unanswered.

Therefore, the purpose of the present article was to advance our understandings about the face concept from the perspective of indigenous psychology. In this article, we adopted an indigenous psychological approach hoping that such approach will not only capture the cultural diversity of the conceptualization of face, but also reveal the psychological and social implications of face in the cultural contexts.

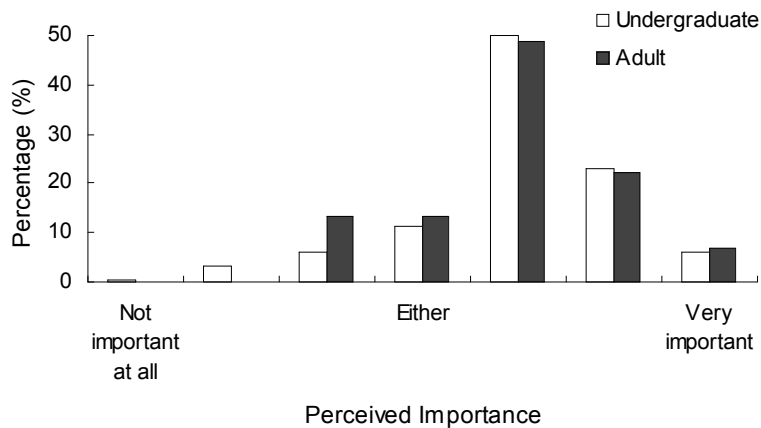
## JAPANESE FOLK CONCEPT OF FACE, MENTSU AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

*Mentsu* means social face in Japanese culture (e.g., Morisaki & Gundkunst, 1994; Sueda, 1998). Some researchers suggest that this concept of social face, *Mentsu*, is extraordinarily important to understand Japanese social behaviors and cognitions (e.g., Heine et al, 1999; Lebra, 1976). Our empirical investigation confirmed this claimed importance of *mentsu* in Japan (Lin & Yamaguchi, unpublished). We asked 45 Japanese adults (9 males, 36 females; the average age was 43 years old) and 230 Japanese undergraduate students (68 males, 162 females; the average age was 21 years old) to rate how important they think *mentsu* is for themselves and for general others. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, almost 78 % of participants answered that *mentsu* is important for them and about 67 % answered that *mentsu* is important for Japanese in general. This tendency was found both among the student sample and the adult sample.

Thus, the importance of *mentsu* in Japanese everyday life was confirmed empirically.



**Figure 1**  
**Perceived Importance of Mentsu for the Self**



**Figure 2**  
**Perceived Importance of Mentsu for Others in General**

*Mentsu* can be distinguished from at least three similar concepts in social psychology, which are often confused with *mentsu*: public self-consciousness, self-esteem and impression management/self-presentation. Public self-consciousness represents individual differences in the extent to which they pay attentions to the public self reflected in others' eyes (Fenigstein et al, 1975). *Mentsu* is not just an individual difference in the amount of attention paid to the public self. Rather, it is concerned with the fulfillment of one's social role(s) as expected by others. Thus, *mentsu* is limited one's public image that is related to the person's fulfillment of social role(s). It is possible that people who are high in public self-consciousness tend to care about their *mentsu* to a greater extent than those who are low in public self-consciousness. But *mentsu* is just one factor that would affect one's public image. The two concepts are not interchangeable to each other.

*Mentsu* is not equivalent to self-esteem, either. Self-esteem is typically defined as the positivity of one's self-evaluation (Baumeister, 1998). Even though both concepts are concerned with the internal self-evaluative process, they are different in the terms of the involvement of other people. *Mentsu* represents individuals' social image, whereas self-esteem represents individuals' *internal* self-image. To put it differently, *mentsu* is a social concept in the sense that the presence of others is the indispensable for individuals to experience *mentsu* episode. On the other hand, the presence of other is not essential for individuals' self-esteem to be elevated or lowered (Lin & Yamaguchi, 2006). Although both *mentsu* and self-esteem can be two mechanisms for individuals to maintain positive self-view in Japan (Hiene, 2005), *mentsu* and self-esteem represent two different functions and cannot be replaced by each other.

*Mentsu* can also be distinguished from impression management or self-presentation, which refers to "the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people" (Leary, 1995). Impressions being managed or presented can be either positive or negative, depending on individuals' motivations or intentions. For instance, people sometimes present themselves as less smart or less competent in order to ingratiate a target whom is expected to prefer them not to possess certain knowledge or skills. This is called *play dump* in the literature of impression management (self-presentation) (Leary, 1995, pp.102). Thus, if one plays dumb, his or her public image will become negative. On the contrary, *mentsu* is always concerned with socially desirable values. That is, the public images *mentsu* represents are always positive. In addition, impression management can be considered a strategy to maintain or save one's *mentsu*. Furthermore, targets of *mentsu* and impression management or self-presentation are different. Individuals can protect, save or maintain not only their own *mentsu* but also other people's *mentsu*, whereas impression management is concerned only with individuals' own impressions.

Because *mentsu* can be conceptually distinguished from similar concepts in social psychology, as we have discussed, we will propose our own definition and delineate the differences among Japanese *mentsu*, Western face, and the Chinese *mien-tzu* / *lien* in details.

According to a lexical definition (Koujien 5<sup>th</sup>, 1998), the word *mentsu* means "the social reputations or social appearance". This definition indicates that Japanese *mentsu* shares the same feature as the English face and the Chinese *mien-tzu*, namely one's public image. However, this definition seems to be too general to capture characteristics of face that is specific to Japanese culture. Thus, in order to understand how lay Japanese people conceptualize *mentsu* in the cultural context, we asked participants in the same survey as described above to answer what they think *mentsu* is in an open-ended question. Content analysis of the data revealed three components in people's definition of *mentsu*: social positions and social roles, others' expectations and evaluations, and individuals' internal evaluations (Table 2)<sup>3</sup>.



**Table 2**  
**Three Components of Japanese Definition of Mentsu**

Components	Frequency (%)		Example
	Student	Adult	
Social role and social position	35	15.56	<i>Mentsu</i> is what individuals are expected by the society or the organizations. <i>Mentsu</i> is something related to individuals' social status or their social role.
Others' expectation and evaluation	30	38.15	<i>Mentsu</i> is another face being expected. <i>Mentsu</i> is individuals' good image that is expected by the surroundings.
Individuals' internal evaluation	25	33.33	Maintenance of <i>mentsu</i> is the maintenance of self-value. <i>Mentsu</i> is associated to individuals' values and self-evaluation.

*Mentsu and ascribed social roles.* Almost 35% of the adults and 15% of the students described *mentsu* as something related to the roles or positions in a social group, institution or society (Table 2). For example, '(mentsu is) a necessary thing to protect one's social status or the credibility related to it', '(mentsu is) the preoccupation with accomplishing one's jobs ascribed by his or her social role' and so on. In addition, we found that when being asked to raise the *mentsu* they need to protect or to maintain, people tend to answer their job-related *mentsu* (i.e., *mentsu* as a doctor), parentage *mentsu* (i.e., *mentsu* as being a mother or a father), and partnership *mentsu* (i.e., *mentsu* as being a wife). These examples clearly indicate that Japanese *mentsu* is importantly related to social role.

The suggestion of Japanese persistence to the social role has its theoretical root in cultural anthropology and social linguistics. Consistent to our argument, previous research has not only indicated that Japanese are extremely sensitive to their social role / position and the relative social ranking (e.g., Lebra, 1976; Nakane, 1970) but also pointed out that this preoccupation with social role ascribed by social position influence how Japanese perceive their face (e.g., Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988). For example, Lebra (1976) focused on the Japanese word *bun*, which means "portion" or "component", as an illustration of Japanese orientation toward proper-place occupancy in the world. In line with such previous suggestion that face conceptualization in a particular culture is regulated by the culture's values and ethos (e.g., Hu, 1944; Ting-Toomy, 1994), Matsumoto (1988) further argued that this strong recognition of one's social position indeed became the basic component of Japanese face concept. Similarly, Ide (1989) insisted that one's sense of social position or social role in a given situation as dictated by social conventions is actually a practice of facework in Japanese culture.

To summarize, Japanese face concept, *mentsu*, is most appropriately considered an ascribed public image that comes from the social roles individuals possess. Thus, one may have several types of *mentsu* and a specific type of *mentsu* can be activated at a specific situation.

*Mentsu and fulfillment of social roles as expected by others.* The second component we found in the survey was the involvement of other's expectations and evaluations. Almost 30% of adults and 38% of students in the survey mentioned that evaluations or expectations by other people are used as a yardstick against which their own *mentsu* is

measured. For example, respondents in the survey answered, “(*mentsu* is) the personal responsibility to meet others’ expectation,” “*mentsu* is different from the internal personality. It is the person’s another face expected by the society.” As Inoue (1977) pointed out, this is the so-called ‘the public eye’ as the standard of people’s behavior.

*Subjective nature of mentsu.* Almost 25 % of adults and 33% of students mentioned that *mentsu* is influenced by individuals’ performance and its evaluation. Respondents answered, for example, “(*mentsu* is related to) the value you place on yourself,” “(*mentsu* is related to) the cognition or the emotion when there is an inconsistency or discrepancy between self-evaluation or self-consciousness and others’ expectations.” This finding indicates that whether people maintain or lose *mentsu* is determined by the results of their internal evaluative process on their achievements. If one’s evaluation of the achievement is better than a certain standard (such as others’ expectations), his or her *mentsu* is maintained. Otherwise, if one’s evaluation is worse than the standard, he or she would lose *mentsu*. Therefore, individuals’ *mentsu* is expected to fluctuate, depending on the outcome of achievement. In addition, we suggest that it is this component that makes *mentsu* sometimes covariate with self-esteem, which goes up and down along with individuals’ success and failure.

Based on those findings, we propose that Japanese face concept, *mentsu*, can be understood as *individual’s public images that he or she fulfills the social roles as expected*. People would lose their *mentsu* if they fail to perform well at the activities relevant to their social role in the presence of others; on the other hand, successful fulfillment of social role will allow individuals to maintain their *mentsu*. Indeed, this definition is consistent with previous views on the definition of Japanese face (e.g., Kato, 2000; Sueda, 1998). Kato (2000) argues that *mentsu* is related to how individuals comprehend and exercise their social position, status or roles. Also, Sueda (1998) concluded, based upon subjects’ response to five scenarios, that Japanese tend to be more concerned with their *mentsu* when there is an involvement of their social status in the situation.

In the following section, we will elaborate on the characteristics of Japanese *mentsu* by discussing differences and similarities between Japanese *mentsu* and the other cultural face concepts, say, the English face and the Chinese *mien-tzu* / *lien*.

## JAPANESE FACE CONCEPT AS CONTRASTED WITH THE ENGLISH AND THE CHINESE FACE CONCEPTS

As previous research suggests, using the word ‘face’ to represent people’s public image seems to be a universal phenomenon (*etic* component in Table 1). However, because each culture has its own system of positive social values, the content of ‘face’ and the strategies of facework may well be culture specific. To put it differently, each cultural face concept has its own characteristics (i.e., culturally unique or *emic* components in Table 1). In this section, we will attempt to highlight the uniqueness of Japanese face concept *mentsu* by contrasting it with the English face concept and the Chinese face concept.

*Mentsu versus face.* As we have discussed at the introduction of this chapter, face can be understood as the positive self-images that individuals want to claim to others. If face is defined as such, the only element *mentsu* and face share in common is positive public image. In other words, both *mentsu* and face represent something socially (and culturally) desirable and they both are threatened only when other people are present.

Other than this common component, *mentsu* and face are different in at least two aspects.

First, although both *mentsu* and face refer to individuals' public self-images, the basic motivation underlying them may be different from each other (Matsumoto, 1988). As Matsumoto (1988) suggests, while the desire to defend one's proper territory from others constitutes the English face concept, the acknowledgment and the desire to maintain one's social position is the focal concern of the Japanese face concept. This motivation underlying face maintenance is especially prominent in the English notion of negative face. Negative face is one aspect of public self-images that individuals wish to claim for the self, which refers to the basic claim for one's own territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, researchers have failed to locate a connotation equivalent to negative face in Japanese *mentsu* (e.g., Kato, 2000; Matsumoto, 1988).

Secondly, face and *mentsu* are concerned with different situations. Because *mentsu* represents a person's public images that the person fulfills a social role as expected by others, it would be reasonable that Japanese do care about their *mentsu* only when interacting with those who have certain kinds of relationships with them. More specifically, hierarchy and power balance in the relationships would influence the amount of people's concerns about *mentsu* in Japanese culture.

On the other hand, face concern is more influenced by the intimacy with the interactants<sup>4</sup>. That is, individuals care about their face to a greater extent when interacting with someone who is not close to them; on the other hand, because of the better understanding of each other's real self, face is not a serious issue in the intimate relationship and thus, people would pay less attention to their face when interacting with a romantic partner (Lim, 1994).

Indeed, previous research supports our reasoning (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Usami, 2002). Morisaki and Gudykunst (1994) suggest that in Japan individuals are more concerned with maintaining *mentsu* over the course of relationship (with specific others) whereas in United State individuals are more concerned with maintaining face in the immediate situation. Usami (2002) argues also that *mentsu* is a relatively long-term issue while face is rather a short-term issue, and therefore, *mentsu* and face are intrinsically distinct issues for individuals to deal with.

Finally, even though both Japanese and people from English-speaking countries would conduct some kind of face (or *mentsu*)-work when necessary, the target of face (or *mentsu*)-work as well as the way people conduct it would differ. Japanese people tend to do *mentsu*-work not only for themselves but also for other people, especially for those who are superiors and those who have power or influences over them. On the other hand, people from English-speaking countries may only do facework to protect or save their own face. Furthermore, because *mentsu* is ascribed to individuals based on their social role, Japanese people do not have to 'claim' for their *mentsu*. Instead, they need to make efforts to maintain *mentsu* or to not to lose *mentsu*. On the other hand, face would not become an issue in the West, unless individuals claim it.

*Mentsu versus mien-tzu / lien.* As discussed in the introduction, there are two terms to describe face concept in Chinese: *mien-tzu*, which refers to the kind of social image attained through one's achievement, success or ostentation, and *lien*, which refers to the social image of one's moral integrity. *Mentsu* does not carry such meanings of *lien* in Japan. Rather, *mentsu* is similar to what *mien-tzu* represents. Therefore, in this section, we will not compare *mentsu* with *lien*; instead, we will compare *mentsu* with *mien-tzu*.

Probably because the word *mentsu* originally came from China, the Japanese

*mentsu* bears some resemblances to the Chinese *mein-tzu*. For example, both *mentsu* and *mien-tzu* emphasize the public, communal aspects of face, and both pay great attention to others' face and conduct *mentsu* (or *mien-tzu*)-work to protect, maintain or save others' *mentsu* (or *mien-tzu*), etc (e.g., Kato, 2000; Mao, 1994). However, there are still some differences between the Japanese *mentsu* and the Chinese *mien-tzu*. First, as shown in Table 1, *mentsu* refers to the public image about one's fulfillment of his or her social role whereas *mien-tzu* refers to the public image about one's power (specifically, one's economic status and one's competence). Therefore, we suggest that situations in which people are concerned with their *mentsu* (or *mien-tzu*) would also be different. This reasoning is supported by Sueda (1998), who asked Japanese and Chinese undergraduate students to read scenarios and evaluate the extent to which they perceive the described situations as involving loss of *mentsu* or *mien-tzu*. The result indicated that Japanese participants tended to be concerned with their *mentsu* more than their Chinese counterparts when the situation involved their social status or the appropriateness of treatment according to their social status. On the other hand, Chinese participants tended to be more concerned with their *mien-tzu* when the situation involved the evaluation of their performance or competence. Thus, Japanese *mentsu* are relevant to their social roles, whereas Chinese *mien-tzu* is concerned with their performance and competence.

Finally, *mentsu* and *mien-tzu* would be different in terms of how people conduct *mentsu* (or *mien-tzu*)-work for others. When conducting *mien-tzu* work for others, Chinese people usually say, 'to give *mien-tzu*'. However, there is no such a usage in Japanese *mentsu*.

#### How Do Mentsu Involve in Japanese People?

We have discussed the conceptualization of Japanese *mentsu* from its literal meaning to the theoretical definition and the characteristics of *mentsu* as compared with other cultural face concepts. Because it is now clear that *mentsu* is perceived as important not only for the self but also for the general others in Japan, we will attempt to answer the next question: How much is *mentsu* important. In other words, we will attempt to examine the involvement of *mentsu* in Japanese everyday life.

There are at least two possible approaches to examine the involvement of *mentsu* in Japanese everyday life. The first one is to look at how Japanese perceive *mentsu*, especially the factors that affect people's perceptions of loss of *mentsu* (the antecedents of *mentsu*). For example, we asked Japanese participants to specify the kinds of situations they think they have to stand for their *mentsu* (Lin & Yamaguchi, 2004a). Content analysis of the respondents' answers revealed three categories of situations in which people feel necessary to protect or maintain their *mentsu*: (a) situations in which social roles or occupations are involved, (b) situations in which formality is important (such as a formal meeting, an interview by the press) and (c) situations in which the interactants have particular kinds of relationships (such as hierarchical relationships, power relationships) with them. Therefore, individuals will not just to lose *mentsu* when failing to fulfill someone's social roles in the presence of others. The amount of loss of *mentsu* would be affected by the kind of social role being questioned and the kind of people whom they are interacting with. Taking this line of reasoning, Lin & Yamaguchi (2005) investigated the effects of the situation formality and the status difference on Japanese perception of *mentsu* loss. Results indicate a strong effect of situations formality over status differences. Japanese tended to perceive as losing *mentsu* to a greater extent when they failed to fulfill the expectations based on social roles in the

formal situations than in the personnel situations. When we compared the perception of losing *mentsu* between the formal situation and personal situation by the status difference of interactants, no significant differences were found in the perception of losing face either in the presence of a superior or in the presence of a peer. However there were significant differences in the perception of losing *mentsu* when being in the presence of a subordinate. This result suggests that people are perceived as losing *mentsu* to a greater extent in front of subordinates, probably due to greater expectations about social role fulfillment by the subordinates as compared with the superiors or the peers.

The second approach is to search for the psychological and interpersonal consequences of *mentsu*. For example, we examined the relationships between daily *mentsu* experiences and psychological well-being during 10 weeks (Lin & Yamaguchi, 2006a). The results of this survey indicates that even though the maintenance of *mentsu* was related to higher positive moods (such as happy, content, and so on), lower negative moods (such as anxious, sad, and so on) and higher daily self-esteem, the occurrence of *mentsu* event itself seems to be a negative experience for Japanese people. Because Japanese *mentsu* represents the social image about the extent to which individuals fulfill their social role, any *mentsu* event can be considered a threat. Therefore, as a consequence, the occurrence of *mentsu* event influences Japanese people's daily well-being and daily self-esteem in a negative manner.

## CONCLUSION

Face and facework have not been received much empirical attention despite their popularity in the literature. The present conceptual analysis, guided by the indigenous psychology perspective, will enable us to conduct systematic research on face as we have already started in Japan. The initial evidence on Japanese *mentsu* is promising. The findings indicate that the perception of *mentsu* is affected by situational factors, as predicted by the proposed definition. The results also indicated that *mentsu* is important for Japanese because the maintenance of *mentsu* is essential for Japanese psychological well-being.

Because the indigenous psychology approach can be applicable to cultures other than Japan, we insist that researchers in other cultures launch empirical research on face in their own culture as well. Further evidence, which will be obtained in such studies, will hopefully enable us to understand the common components as well as unique components of the concept of face across cultures. No doubt human beings are concerned about how we look in others' eyes, as long as we remain a social animal.

Admittedly, our research on face has just started and more empirical research is needed. For example, consequences of *mentsu* and *mentsu*-work for interpersonal relationship need to be examined. Because other people are always involved in *mentsu* and *mentsu*-work, the maintenance or loss of face would not only affect one's psychological conditions but also affect one's relationship with others involved such processes. Cross-cultural differences in face and face-work also remain an open question. Although we predict cultural differences in how people maintain their face, *mentsu*, or *mien-tzu*, empirical data have not been obtained to examine this prediction. Future research should pay attention to functions of face in our everyday life. We focused on the concept of face in this chapter due to the lack of clear definition of face concepts. Because our definition of *mentsu* is consistent with lay perception, the next

step would be to examine its function in our everyday life.

## NOTES

1. The authors are aware of the plausible inappropriateness of using the term, English face, to group those English-speaking cultures together because it is agreeable that even using the same language, the nuances of face may be different among these cultures. However, in order to make clear comparison to Japanese *mentsu* in this article, this grouping was used only for the descriptive purpose.
2. Even though there are other collective forms of face (like face at the group-level or face at the national level), the discussion in the present article is only limited to the individual-level.
3. Due to the limitation of time and space, most of the participants gave their definition of *mentsu* in only one or two short sentences in the survey. This methodological shortcoming resulted in that the percentages for three components were not as high as predicted. Therefore, in order to supplement the findings reported here, the authors are planning to conduct an in-depth interview where participants can freely describe what they think about *mentsu*.
4. 'Interactant' refers to people whom individuals are interacting with. This terminology was used by Goffman (1967, pp.7) and therefore, it is now frequently used in the sociolinguistic studies.
5. In Japanese language, the two words *kao* and *menmoku* are sometimes used interchangeably for the word *mentsu*.

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