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Appeals to social power in Chinese business communication

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Appeals to social power in
Chinese business communication

by

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

John Milo Jamison

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Major Professor

For the Major Program

For the Graduate College
This paper is dedicated to all of my Chinese students who gave me the love of China necessary to do my research and then became a major portion of my subject base to help me carry out my research. Hopefully I’ve taught them well enough that some day they’ll be able to read this and tear it apart.
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Divergences between persuasion in Chinese business communication and American business communication can be examined at a deeper level than the traditional method of observing divergent rhetorical strategies. Additional light can be shed on persuasive Chinese business communication strategies by looking at the underlying appeals being made to social power. These appeals, which may often seem nonsensical or illogical to an American businessperson, are based on the set of cultural, political, and social values that the Chinese consider valid and meaningful. A conscious understanding of these appeals may give an American reader deeper insights into the intended meaningfulness of a Chinese business document or utterance. Sample business documents will be examined in this paper for instances of appeals to social power.
INTRODUCTION

The existing research into Chinese business communication has helped to gather a fair list of rhetorical strategies used in Chinese business communication that are generally divergent from American strategies (e.g. back-loading, indirectness, circular logic, and inexplicit points). However, we know that there is more to the practice of rhetoric than strategies. Any argument is always driven by a set of power bases that the communicators consider meaningful, appropriate, and influential. Suchan (1998), for example, observes that the low-impact style of a government agency is not an arbitrary convention, but that it is based on a set of beliefs held by the employees about what kinds of rhetoric are appropriate to their workplace. Hagge and Kostelnick (1989) also demonstrate how the seemingly weak rhetorical practices (i.e. the use of passives, nominalizations, expletive constructions, and hedging particles) of a major accounting firm stem from and are intrinsic to the firm’s underlying beliefs about what will be appropriate to their rhetorical situation.

And as in the cases of Suchan and Hagge and Kostelnick’s studies, we must assume that the great divergences of international business communication strategies from their American counterparts suggest an underlying divergence of what is meaningful, appropriate, and influential. However, as yet there has been little research into the underlying power issues present in international business communication. In this paper I will investigate the underlying power issues present in Chinese business communication. Without knowledge of these issues, the comprehension of a Chinese business document consists of little more than a translation of rhetorical strategies.
An example of this rhetorical translation comes from a businessman whom I interviewed and who told me that he had "caught onto the Chinese’s writing style." As this man saw it, one of the keys to reading Chinese business documents was knowing that they back load all of their documents. Once he had figured this out, he began jumping to the end of every document he received from a Chinese businessperson in order to get to "the bottom line." For this businessperson, the effective understanding of a Chinese business document entailed little more than translating the foreign stylistic conventions into more familiar conventions. Although he claimed that this reading strategy has increased his understanding of the texts and the speed with which he made conclusions about their meaning, it holds the obvious danger of overlooking the significance of the preceding text.

Research into Chinese rhetorical strategies in business has been sparse to date and has most often focused on one or a few particular rhetorical strategies in isolation rather than the underlying principles behind the commonly occurring strategies. Although such studies have been valuable for furthering our understanding of Chinese professional communication, practicing communicators would likely find it frustrating to sift through the mountain of articles just to end up with a finite list of particular rhetorical strategies. This paper takes a different approach by building on French and Raven’s taxonomy of social power bases in order to enlighten the driving forces behind Chinese rhetorical strategies. My hope is that this taxonomy might help in seeing the underlying forces as a comprehensible set of cultural values rather than an ethereal "otherness" of the Chinese that can only be glimpsed through the window of largely mysterious rhetorical strategies.

In this paper I argue that Chinese business people draw upon a different set of appeals to social power than American businesspeople when attempting to influence their business
colleagues. This paper proposes a taxonomy of appeals to social power that is based on French and Raven’s (1959) five social power bases and is informed by a wide array of writing on Chinese communication. These writings include a large volume of scholarly publications (i.e. academic journal articles and scholarly cultural studies) but also include other legitimate sources; including handbooks for interaction with the Chinese (Hu & Grove, 1991; Schneiter, 1992), narratives of experience with the Chinese, and Chinese textbooks (Xia, Xia, & Dai, 1995; Yin, Ankli & Rieder, 1991). It is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper to report on the methodologies and findings of each of these texts’ research, but I have made an effort to point out interesting issues in particular works when referenced. In many cases I have also drawn upon my own experience teaching business students in China and following their professional development after graduation. I have also made an effort to discuss some of the divergences between the Chinese manifestations of social forces in the taxonomy and their American counterparts.

Before going into detail on these appeals, however, it is important to note that the taxonomy that builds from French and Raven’s through my analysis of the existing Chinese communication research is assumed to be generally complete and validated by the research it is taken from. This paper does not try to prove or disprove the existence of any of the sources of social power extrapolated from these studies. Except when noted, these studies are all widely held to be reliable, accurate, and based on the authors’ own research. Attempting to disprove their findings would be another endeavor entirely and is outside the focus of this paper. Even this paper’s limited sample of Chinese business documents cannot be seen as an attempt to disprove my taxonomy of appeals to social power bases since the small sample size employed in this analysis could not prove that an appeal does not exist.
outside of the sample. Similarly, the sample documents in this paper can not be seen as proof that these appeals are cultural norms since they are not a broad enough sample and since no attempt was made to collect occurrences of each appeal.
Patterns in Chinese Business Communication Research

In the last decade there have been compelling arguments for an increased emphasis on preparing businesspeople for international communication (Boiarsky 1995; Bosley 1993) and calling for increased research into intercultural communication (Goldzwig 1988; Rogers 1998; Limaye & Victor 1991; Shuter 1990). Some researchers have even posited that culture is actually the central issue of professional communication (Weiss 1992; Longo 1997). Although there have been a number of valuable and intriguing case studies produced recently which treat international business communication more thoroughly (Hagen 1998; Devet 1998; Artemeva 1998), little work has been done to put such cases into a prescriptive theoretical framework (some notable examples being Devet 1998; Park, Dillon & Mitchell 1998; James 1995; Beamer 1995; and Brislin & Yoshida 1994). As a result, the volume of research that is being produced, although increasing over the last decade, still discusses international business communication in terms of cultural anecdotes (Kemper 1998; Serebryakova-Colins 1998; Walker 1999; and Aboulafia-DiJaen 1998 to name only a few). Because of the increased emphasis on culture and the lack of a shared language with which to discuss culture, researchers also began to investigate the nature of culture in a business context (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Beamer, 1995b).

The research into Chinese business communication in particular has often followed this pattern. However, there has also been a number of investigations which have tended to focus on two important and challenging directions. The first and by far larger research
direction has been in the area of Chinese/foreign business interaction in English. For the most part, these articles have focused on the miscommunications between Chinese and foreign businesspeople when dealing in English. Although many of these articles have bordered on the anecdotal (questionable empirically but certainly some of the most widely read as well), there have been profound and insightful looks into the cross-cultural interview process (Wong & Lai, 2000), the value for foreign business people in learning Chinese (Du-Babcock & Babcock 1996), and communication styles of Chinese students studying in the United States (Beamer 1994).

The great strength of these articles has been the contrasts they have offered between Chinese and foreign (in most cases American) business communication practices. The shortcoming of these studies is that they typically focus on the divergences between the cultures and, thus, rarely represent a comprehensive study of all of the cultural dynamics present in the aspect of communication studied.

The smaller (but, in my opinion, far more engaging) trend in Chinese business communication research has been in the area of Chinese business communication practices in a Chinese context. Unlike the previously mentioned articles, these articles have attempted to map out the ways in which Chinese businesspeople interact with other Chinese businesspeople. They also differ in that rather than contrasting Chinese business communication with the business communication of the article’s readers, these articles tend to limit themselves to making observations.

The strength of these articles has been their promise of a more comprehensive look at the entirety of Chinese business communication practices. Krone, Garrett, and Ling (1992), for example, report on an entire set of persuasive devices utilized by Chinese factory
managers rather than focusing on the persuasive devices that make an interesting counterpoint to those used by an American factory manager. Unfortunately, since these articles are so new, there has been little opportunity to interpret their results. Thus, although there is a wonderful initial list of managerial persuasive tactics, there’s been no opportunity to examine what that means for American businesspeople.

In addition to the articles that have followed these trends, there have been a number of articles that have looked more directly at the rhetorical tools which the Chinese use to influence others in business negotiations (Zhao, 2000; Beamer, 1998; Yin, Ankli, & Rieder, 1991), in business interactions with foreign business partners (Liu & Vince, 1999; Li, 1999; Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996), in management (Yuan, 2000; Mak, 1999; Krone, Chen, & Xia, 1997; Krone, Garrett, & Chen, 1992), in Chinese organizations (Chen, 2000; Nowak & Dong, 1997), in non-native languages (Lundelius, 1997), through graphics (Courtis, 1997), and in particular genres (Zhu, 2000; Wang & Phooi-Ching, 2000). These works have played an important part in beginning discussions about the ways that Chinese businesspeople use and interpret influence.

**Appeals to Social Power Bases**

The first step when discussing the forces that drive the strategies employed by a community is to decide on a broad model for understanding the nature of the underlying force. One early model that has remained in use is French and Raven’s (1959) discussion of social power bases. French and Raven identified five bases of social power (reward, coercive, referent, legitimate, and expert) that social agents draw from both actively and passively in influencing a person. French and Raven define power “in terms of influence,
and influence in terms of psychological change” (150). Their model has remained the most relevant work in compliance gaining research (Wheeless, Baraclough, & Stewart, 1983; David & Baker, 1994). Their model is particularly useful in this study since this study is concerned with the forces that Chinese businesspeople might draw upon to exert influence. It is also particularly suited for this study in that it was not created to represent only one particular culture but rather the whole spectrum of human culture.

French and Raven define a social power base as the empowering relationship between a person and a social agent. Social power in this case is defined as “the maximum potential ability of [the social agent] to influence [the person] in [a system]” (1959, p. 152). French and Raven identify five primary categories of power bases: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power.

One of the advantages of using French and Raven’s taxonomy in this paper lies in the broad range of ways in which social agents exert social power. Since this paper hopes to examine the motivating forces behind Chinese business communication’s persuasion tactics (here used synonymously with influence), this broad range helps to facilitate a more consistent view of those forces than would a cocktail of models dealing with individual power bases. Another advantage of using this taxonomy is the ease in applying it to a wide variety of cultures since the power bases it uses are common and important to humanity in general (155) and do not seem to be particular to any cultures. However, while we can be confident that both Chinese and American businesspeople use and are influenced by all five of French and Raven’s social power bases, there is still room to look for the different manifestations of those power bases in each country.
Although every culture seems to be influenced and exert influence from each of French and Raven’s five social power bases, the way in which the power bases manifest themselves varies from culture to culture. For example, in the masculine American culture (Hofstede 1980, “masculine” and “feminine” here referring to Hofstede’s set of predominant work goals observed in a culture rather than the gender of any individual), a promise of speedy promotion and advancement might carry great reward power. On the other hand, in a highly feminine culture the same promise might carry much less reward power than the promise of a good working relationship between colleagues and supervisors. Since there is such variance between cultures in the manifestations of social power, each of French and Raven’s social power bases can be broken down into the possible manifestations of each power base according to the particular culture or community being examined. Reward power, for example, could manifest itself as anything from a cash prize to a high grade to increased affection. Each of these manifestations would be influential in some situations but not in others. In this way, French and Raven’s social power bases can be seen as broad categories of methods of influence. When an agent attempts to use a particular manifestation of social power, that agent will always attempt to appeal to the manifestation of social power that she perceives as being most appropriate. In this way, a manager would no more make an appeal to reward power with little happy face stickers than a kindergarten school teacher might tell his students that the class will be a big resume builder.

There are, of course, countless situations where the appropriateness of an appeal is not as certain as one would like. For example, when pulled over for a speeding ticket would offering a bribe to the police officer exert any influence or would it land the driver in jail? Individuals have, to a varying degree, an intuitive sense about the appropriateness of certain
appeals within their own culture. However, every competent individual has some sort of logical, culturally defined cognitive framework for how to make appropriate appeals to social power bases and is, despite uncertainties about appropriateness, able to exert sufficient influence over others to perform most tasks that their life calls for (e.g.: talking down the price of a used car, getting roommates to do their share of the cleaning, proposing to a significant other). Although there are several possible factors in deciding the appropriateness of a particular appeal to social power in any given context, in this paper I will examine the role of a Chinese businessperson’s culture in defining what are generally held as appropriate appeals to social power in Chinese business communication.

In addition to the questions of an appeal’s appropriateness, there are also two great difficulties that must be addressed in categorizing cases of appeals to social power. First, it is difficult for acts of influence in any cultural context be placed within only one source of social power (French & Raven, 155). More often, acts of influence appeal to several bases of social power, as in the case of a manager who promises to give an employee a bonus if a project is brought in below budget, thus appealing to both legitimate power (being a manager) and reward power (the promise of a bonus). Categorization is also made problematic by the plurality of social agents that may appeal to a single individual (131).

In regards to the first difficulty, there is still some freedom in interpreting which social power base a particular appeal belongs to as shown in my discussion of particular appeals. However, labeling a common act of influence as a particular appeal to social power may help somewhat in understanding from which social power base the act comes and therefore enlighten the social agent’s intentions. In regards to the second difficulty, breaking the social power bases into the more manageable units of appeals in this taxonomy could
dispel some confusion by suggesting which appeals typically draw from which source of power.
CHINESE APPEALS TO SOCIAL POWER BASES

Table 1 shows the appeals to social power that I have found to be most prevalent in Chinese business communication based on my research and personal experience. It also offers the ways that American business people might typically view each of the Chinese appeals. The appeals in this list were collected by examining the existing research and cataloging the most common and agreed upon appeals to social power.

Appeals to Reward Power

According to French and Raven, “Reward Power depends on [the social agent’s] ability to administer positive valences and to remove or decrease negative valences” (1959, p. 156). Any appeal to reward power in a Chinese context is often difficult to identify because of nuances of their low context culture (Hall, 1976). More so than in the United States, Chinese appeals to reward power will be unstated or vague. Often this is a practical result of the Chinese' avoidance of fixed agreements (Hu & Grove, 101), but it may also reflect the Chinese downplaying of personal gains (a characteristic of collectivism particularly prevalent during the communist era). Traditionally, the Chinese government has emphasized the importance of intangible rewards such as community esteem and national pride (although new reports show evidence that monetary rewards are also being used more widely as noted by Krone, Garrett, & Chen 1992; Krone, Chen & Xia 1997; Yuan, 2000).

There are two types of appeals to reward power in Chinese business that are particularly
Table 1. American occurrences of Chinese appeals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Base</th>
<th>Chinese Appeals</th>
<th>American Manifestation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Long Term Benefits</td>
<td>Short term benefits emphasized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Group Actualization</td>
<td>Personal actualization emphasized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Duty</td>
<td>Duty seen as constraining and often retaliated against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Job Security</td>
<td>Advancement emphasized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to the Status Quo</td>
<td>Change, reform emphasized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Luck</td>
<td>Religion is seen positively, luck seen as superstition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Guanxi</td>
<td>“Contacts” important but nepotism frowned upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Harmony</td>
<td>Harmony valued but can be negative if achieved through the sacrifice of personal convictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Organizational Authority</td>
<td>Organization seen less as an entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Age</td>
<td>Legitimacy given less automatically to age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Tradition</td>
<td>Innovation valued over tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Non-Contractual Agreements</td>
<td>Almost exclusive concern with contractual agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Expert Authority</td>
<td>Expertise highly valued and investigated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
notable because of their common usage in a Chinese context and their rarity in American business: *Appeals to Long Term Benefits* and *Appeals to Group Actualization*.

*Appeals to Long Term Benefits*: The Chinese are more likely than Americans to appeal to long term, often vague, benefits that would result from the social agent's influence (Hu & Grove 1991 p.99; Schneiter 1992 p.171). Often these appeals seem to rely on a sort of "give and take" mentality related to the *guanxi* system discussed later where the person being influenced is assured of receiving equivalent, although not always like, reimbursement for accepting the agent's influence (Hu & Grove 1991 p.61). For example, a typical business agreement for trading Chinese agricultural products may focus less on the immediate profits of the current transaction and more on the potential for the two companies to form a mutually beneficial business partnership.

Long term business relationships are not, of course, unique to Chinese business. According to the survey of Pan et al., more Americans felt that connections were important than did the Chinese (Americans 85%, Chinese 70%) (61). The difference seems to lie in how those business relationships are used. According to the survey, 72% of Chinese find it acceptable to use connections to solve problems as opposed to only 11% of Americans. The writers note that, "The contrast at the practical level is so great that we can have little doubt that a willingness to put one's connections to use is a Chinese cultural trait that has survived communist indoctrination to the contrary" (Pan et al. 1994 p.72).

*Appeals to Group Actualization*: The Chinese are generally more collectivist than Americans and are therefore more concerned with what might benefit their groups (whether that group is their family, office or country) (Hu & Grove 1991, p.94). As a result, Chinese
appeals to rewards may emphasize the rewards that a group may derive more often than American appeals, which tend to emphasize personal actualization (see Table 1).

**Appeals to Coercive Power**

The coercive power of a social agent is equal to, "the expectation on the part of [the person] that he will be punished by [the social agent] if he fails to conform to the influence attempt" (French & Raven, 1959). As in the case of reward power, appeals to coercive power are often hard to distinguish, especially for an American, due to the highly contextual nature of Chinese communication.

Coercive power in Chinese culture is also interesting in that it may carry less negative valence than it does in American culture. Although French and Raven argue that coercion will generally decrease attraction to the agent, I have often been told by Chinese friends and colleagues that certain coercive sanctions are seen as signs of positive attention and care giving. For example, some students and I once observed a young boy behaving very rudely in public, going so far as to yell at his mother and hit his father. My students both agreed that the boy's parents needed to discipline him more strictly and that they were lucky to have had stern fathers who disciplined them harshly. The students were actually becoming nostalgic about being beaten by their fathers! In another case, a colleague in the Foreign Trade department of my college once brought along her teen age son to a department banquet and pointed out to me how well behaved he was. To explain his good behavior, she proudly told me, "It's because I beat him." Thinking that there was some syntactic misunderstanding I attempted to clarify what she could have meant by "beat" (perhaps spanking?). However, she openly acknowledged slapping him, hitting him, and even throwing things at him. In her
mind (and after talking with her son, I have no reason to doubt that it is true in his mind as well), this sort of behavior was a heartfelt expression of love and concern for her son. Such feelings might also carry over into professional settings to the extent that a Chinese employee views his/her manager as a parental figure.

There are four types of appeals to coercive power in Chinese business that are particularly notable because of their common usage in a Chinese context and their rarity in American business: Appeals to Duty, Appeals to Job Security, Appeals to the Status Quo and Appeals to Luck.

Appeals to Duty: Duty and obligation are generally stronger forces in Chinese society than the United States (Pan et al., 1996, p.24; Hu & Grove, 1991, p.66). Although appeals to duty are often based on legitimate power (as in the case of a son who agrees to support his aging parents out of a sense of the parents' legitimate right to such support), I have included this form of appeal in coercion in order to account for the fact that appeals to duty are not always exerted by the object to which a person is obligated. For example, social influence may be exerted on a man to support his parents by his co-workers or friends while the parents refuse to accept the support. In such a case, the agents are not necessarily appealing to their own legitimate power. Such an appeal might be made as, "If you don't do X, you will be delinquent in your duty." This appeal accounts for coercion in as much as the person is threatened with social chastisement for being delinquent in their duty.

Appeals to Job Security: This form of coercion has been far less common in China than in the United States due in part to the concept of the "iron rice bowl" (Hu & Grove, 1991, p.104), where an employee is virtually guaranteed a job by the state. One example of the iron rice bowl phenomenon comes from one of my former students who decided that she
wanted to change jobs after working in a large government bank for a few months. She quickly found that her boss would not accept her resignation and thus sought to be fired from the job by not going to work. But after a month of absence without being fired, she finally decided to take the position at a new company without ever quitting her job at the bank. Understandably, this practice has come under considerable fire in the last twenty years for promoting laziness and for diminishing initiative. The government has been taking measures to discontinue the iron rice bowl through such measures as the recent decision to cease subsidization to unprofitable factories and banks.

*Appeals to the Status Quo:* Appeals to the status quo are coercion in so much as they threaten that a person's situation will become worse if the status quo is threatened. Krone, Garrett, and Chen (1992) point out several instances of this in which a factory supervisor will actually enlist a worker's coworkers, friends and family to have a "heart-to-heart" with a problematic worker in order to encourage the worker to fall in line. By enlisting these agents, the supervisor is making a very strong appeal to the status quo where failure to fall in line would result in increased family and work disharmony. The power of this sort of appeal is shown in that, for the supervisors who acknowledged using it, it is the final attempt at influence after criticism, salary penalties, and even firing.

*Appeals to Luck:* Luck is a well established institution in China and although it is not always taken seriously, it is almost always taken into account (130; Beamer 14). As Fred Schneiter reports, "Despite official pronouncements, a poll by *The Peasants' Daily* in 1989 found that nine out of 10 rural people are superstitious and 60 percent engage in "feudal" superstitious practices" (116). This does not seem to be limited to rural people either since "it's likely that nearly every building of consequence in Hong Kong has been situated and
built with the principles of Feng Shui in mind" (121). Luck can certainly manifest as a coercive power or a reward power but I have included it here since I have more often observed it being appealed to by the threat of negative valences than by the promise of positive valences. Certainly an appeal to luck would be considered an appeal to reward power as much as the person being influenced sees the appeal as promising positive valences.

**Appeals to Referent Power**

French and Raven (1959) define referent power as a feeling of oneness or a desire for such an identity (161). As one would expect from a highly collectivistic culture, Chinese culture places a great deal of emphasis on referent power, and issues of relationship building have been one of the most widely written about topics in Sinology. Although the extensive literature is reflective of the complexity and ambiguity of Chinese relationship dynamics, there are two general types of appeals to referent power in Chinese business that are particularly notable because of their common usage in a Chinese context and their rarity in American business: Appeals to Guanxi and Appeals to Harmony.

**Appeals to Guanxi:** It is almost impossible to discuss Chinese culture without coming to the idea of guanxi. Most commonly, guanxi is defined as "relationships," a definition I find satisfactory because of the multiple meanings of the English word. In practice, guanxi is used to mean everything from an extended family unit to a network of business connections to a petty bribe in some cases (in this way some common appeals to guanxi could also be attributed to reward or coercion power bases). Most Chinese business interactions hinge on guanxi relationships (Hu & Grove, 1996, p.97; Schneiter, 1992, p.163) in a way similar to the
Japanese *keiretsu* or the Korean *chaebol*. Since business is generally viewed as a long term, mutual benefit relationship in China, Chinese business people are very concerned both with presenting themselves as an attractive person or group to be related to and in assessing how desirable the other party is. Appeals to *guanxi* may take many different forms but are always used to accomplish one of these goals.

*Appeals to Harmony*: Pan and others make a significant argument that although the Chinese value on harmony seems to have diminished in recent history, "it is safe to say that interpersonal harmony is valued less in the United States than in China [China 49%, United States 24%]" (1994, pp. 70, [61]). Chinese appeals to harmony often seem like empty rhetoric to Americans, since "the American tradition stresses competition, both economic and in the ‘marketplace of ideas.’ The need for dissent forms part of the rationale for widely shared values such as freedom of expression and independence from authoritarian control. Giving high priority to social harmony would obviously stand at odds with this American presupposition" (p.70). For the Chinese, however, "Conformity to group norms is viewed positively; distinguishing oneself from other group members in any way that disrupts the smooth flow of human relationships is criticized" (Hu & Grove, 1991, p.95). Appeals to harmony will, therefore, apply not to creating a more productive relationship, as in the case of appeals to *guanxi*, but rather to creating a smoother flow of relationship issues. For example, on learning that my Chinese students spent all four years living in the same dormitory room with the same roommates (who were also their classmates), I asked one of my seniors what happened when there was a conflict. Surprisingly, he answered that he would simply stew in his anger in order to avoid conflict. Although most Americans would
agree that pent up anger does not necessarily make a healthy relationship, the Chinese would argue that it would create a more harmonious relationship. In a business setting this form of appeal often derives its power from the group consensus. In many cases, an employee will have to go through a long process of "consensus building" with colleagues and superiors before a final decision can be made. Once consensus is built, it is very difficult to voice dissent (Hu & Grove, 1991).

Appeals to Legitimate Power

Legitimate power stems from a person's internal belief that a particular social agent has a legitimate right to exercise influence. In characterizing legitimate power, French and Raven (1959) describe a feeling of "oughtness" that could stem from any number of sources which cause a person to feel that a social agent has a legitimate right to exert their influence and that there is some obligation to accept this influence (159). There are four types of appeals to reward power in Chinese business that are particularly notable because of their common usage in a Chinese context and their rarity in American business: Appeals to Organizational Authority, Appeals to Age, Appeals to Tradition, and Appeals to Non-Contractual Agreements.

Appeals to Organizational Authority: Appeals to organizational authority claim legitimacy on the basis of position in an accepted hierarchical structure (e.g., government, corporation, family). In most Chinese organizations decisions must be approved by a hierarchical ladder (Hu & Grove 1991 p.92) and lower-level employees rarely posses the authority or information to make even minor decisions (95). In addition, most writers have observed that it is considered very inappropriate to question a decision of someone in
authority (Hu & Grove, 1996, p.95; Schneiter, 1992, p.53; Yang, 1992, p. 64; Xia, Xia & Dai, 1995, p.158), and Pan and others have found that while 78% of the American respondents would express disagreement with a senior, only 23% of Chinese respondents would do so.

It is important to note that although Chinese society has been characterized as being highly diffident towards authority (Yang, 1992; Hu & Grove, 1991; Schneiter, 1992), the strength of the power base seems to be gradually decreasing. In fact, Pan and others have observed that the power of appeals to authority seems to be diminishing in China (only 53% felt proud of submitting to authority and a mere 7% felt proud of pleasing their superiors) largely as a result of events related to the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1965-75). “The finding that only about half of the Chinese respondents endorsed this value is doubtless indicative of a major change from the past, but it may also represent a more recent upward swing from a low point in the 1970's” (Pan et al., 1994, p.61, 69). Also of potential importance to businesses, Pan and others' research also suggest that the power of appeals to government authority may be declining. In their survey, 92% of Americans responded that they were proud of their loyalty to their government while only 77% of Chinese felt proud of their loyalty (62). Pan and others suggest that this may be a logical result of the numerous Chinese revolutions and reform movements of the last century. They also explain the low Chinese numbers by noting that "perhaps some of the Chinese respondents are expressing their disapproval of the current communist government, or perhaps they were put off by the fact that the phrase as worded in the Chinese questionnaire is taken from Confucian teachings" (72).
Appeals to Age: Although it is widely agreed that Chinese culture attributes a higher importance to age than American culture does, Pan and others found only a slight deviance between Chinese and American beliefs that youth respect age (Chinese 97%, Americans 94%). However, they attribute this to the different implications that the questions may have had in each group. While Americans see respect for older people in terms of government policies, according to the authors, Chinese view respect for authority as a personal imperative. In any case, the Chinese seem far more likely than Americans to appeal to age as a source of legitimacy.

Appeals to Tradition: Once again, Pan and others' research has made the significant finding that only 55% of Chinese were proud of their respect for tradition, opposed to 83% of Americans. The writers again attribute this low number to the active campaigns carried out by the communist government, especially during the Cultural Revolution and economic reform periods, and to a wave of cultural fever where "many young scholars subjected the traditional culture to critical reevaluation" (73).

Appeals to Non-Contractual Agreements: As in America, contractual agreements in China can be any binding written or verbal agreement. The Chinese, however, do not generally see contractual agreements as being binding in the same way as Americans do. Unlike an American contractual agreement, which would be as precise as possible and which would attempt to account for every contingency, Chinese contractual agreements tend to be concerned with more general principles of the agreements (Hu & Grove, 1991, p.101). In this way, many Chinese contractual agreements more accurately resemble American mission statements or policy statements. As a result, American appeals to contractual agreements tend to appeal to specific details of the contract, while the Chinese tend to appeal to the
interests behind the contractual agreement. Chinese business people will often devalue appeals to strict contractual agreements and, in some cases, will even disregard or change the agreement in favor of the underlying interests represented by the agreement.

**Appeals to Expert Power**

Expert power relies on "the extent of the knowledge of perception which [a person] attributes to [a social agent] within a given area" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 163), in other words the belief that "s/he would know better than I do." Unlike legitimate power, expert power is exerted by someone who probably knows what should be done rather than someone who has the perceived right to say what should be done. For example, when an office is deciding how to deal with a reorganization, the people being considered to deal with the challenge would probably appeal to their expert power bases to argue for their qualifications for the job. An outside consultant might argue for her expert power by citing the numerous reorganizations she had overseen. An employee of the company, on the other hand, might make use of his expert power by emphasizing his intimate knowledge of the company. The sources I looked at had little to say about the use of expertise power in China, possibly because expertise is so often left unstated by the Chinese. Yao Wei gives an account of a carpenter who is seeking a job after emigrating to the United States. Although he is a highly skilled craftsman, he does not communicate this explicitly to the interviewer and is not hired (from Hu & Grove, 1991, p.50). There is only one type of appeal to reward power in Chinese business that is particularly notable because of its common usage in a Chinese context and its rarity in American business: *Appeals to Expert Authority.*
Appeals to Expert Authority: The only uniquely Chinese characteristic of expert social power (besides its implicitness) is its appeal to authority. It seems that authority in a Chinese institution connotes the authority’s expertise (95). If this is the case, Chinese people will be influenced by authority not only because of its legitimate power but also because of its equation with expertise. Xia, Xia and Dai (1995) give an example in which an employee of a large corporation chooses to quit his job rather than confront his superior with information which, although being accurate, would question his superior’s authority. In this case, the employee considers his superior to be an unquestionable expert based on his higher rank in the corporation even though the employee is clearly the true expert.
APPEALS IN SAMPLE BUSINESS DOCUMENTS

As convenient as it would be, the list of Chinese appeals to social power cannot simply be integrated into international business communication as a "to do" checklist. The appropriate use of appeals to power in any culture is a sophisticated and highly intuitive art. An effective communicator will need to question in which circumstances certain appeals would be appropriate. Would one appeal suffice or would multiple appeals be more effective? Could an appeal to the wrong type of power be damaging to the business relationship? Although there is little hope of ever creating a comprehensive prescription for which and how many appeals to use in any given situation, there is great opportunity to examine the patterns of appeals to social power in Chinese business communication.

It can be valuable to investigate the ways that Chinese business people sometimes make appeals to social power in their communication. For this reason, I have collected a group of twenty-four Chinese business documents which attempt to exert influence over their readers, and I have analyzed them in terms of their appeals to social power. The documents I've examined consist of correspondences (mostly written by employees of small state-owned companies to foreign buyers) and corporate documents intended for distribution to potential buyers or stockholders (all created by large Chinese multinationals: Haier, Galanz, and Chinadotcom). To give examples of how appeals to social power are sometimes used in Chinese business communication, I will discuss five documents that demonstrate a variety of ways in which the appeals to social power are used:
Correspondence 1 and 2 are examples which make only one type of appeal to social power.

Correspondence 3 is an example of a persuasive document that does not make explicit appeals to social power but is a good example of an implicit appeal to social power.

Corporate Document 1 differs from the correspondences in that it contains a large number and variety of appeals that are all somewhat implicit.

Corporate Document 2 also contains multiple appeals but is much more explicit than is Corporate Document 1 and gives great emphasis to relational appeals.

These documents were chosen primarily as examples of how appeals to social power manifest themselves in Chinese business communication. I have tried to choose documents that will display the variety of ways in which appeals are incorporated into (or implied in) a document rather than the variety of appeals that are used in Chinese business documents. I have made this decision because there does not seem to be great variance in the way that a single appeal is integrated into a document, according to my analysis. Rather, the choice of appeal seems to rest entirely on what the writer considers to be most appropriate for the situation. Although a detailed examination of how writers use particular appeals would be interesting and profitable, such a study must be left to future research. However, in this paper I make a preliminary investigation into the appeals used in some of the twenty-four sample documents in terms of the types of appeals used in each document (see Table 2) and the number of appeals that are used in each (see Table 3). Of these twenty-four, eighteen make no explicit appeals to social power. Of the remaining six, five make only one type of appeal to social power while only one makes more than one type of appeal. Of the six
Table 2. Occurrences of types of appeals in sample documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Long Term Benefits</th>
<th>Group Actualization</th>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>Job Security</th>
<th>Status Quo</th>
<th>Luck</th>
<th>Guanxi</th>
<th>Harmony</th>
<th>Organizational Authority</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Non-Contractual Agreements</th>
<th>Expert Authority</th>
<th>Total Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.D.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Occurrences of appeals in sample documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No explicit appeals</th>
<th>One type of explicit appeal</th>
<th>Two types of explicit appeals</th>
<th>3+ types of explicit appeals</th>
<th>Total Documents</th>
<th>Total Types of Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correspondences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondences</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Documents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

corporate documents I have examined (all sent out to potential investors and most posted on the company web site), all made multiple types of appeals to social power. To give examples of the variety of occurrences I’ve observed in Chinese business documents, I have included sample documents that have many appeals (Corporate Document 1 & 2), a single appeal (Correspondence 1 & 2), and no explicit appeal (Correspondence 3).

Research Methodology

Of the correspondences, the majority of the Chinese documents were written by representatives of small, state-owned companies to foreign buyers or distributors. In addition, one of the Chinese documents was written from a Chinese marketing company to a
potential American representative. All of the correspondences written by foreign businesspeople were sent from foreign buyers or distributors to their Chinese counterparts. I have chosen to include the documents written by foreigners in my statistical information to show an initial comparison, although further research should be done into this area to investigate more fully the extent with which foreigners make appeals that would seem to be native to Chinese business. In most instances, the Chinese and foreign samples represent a dialogue between the Chinese and foreign counterparts, although I have distinguished between these and ones which are written from foreigners to their Chinese counterparts. All of the corporate documents were written by Chinese companies for a broad readership of Chinese and foreign potential investors and clients. Two of the corporate documents are letters from the CEOs, three are introductions to the company, and one is an international expansion report. All were created by large Chinese multinationals: Haier, Galanz, and Chinadotcom. In all of the sample documents quoted here, I have not corrected the original grammatical and spelling errors.

Correspondences

The first and most notable finding in the analysis of the correspondences was that the majority of them make no appeals to social power. Instead, the majority of the correspondences lay out their requests in a very straightforward way with very little introduction, as shown in Correspondence 1. Only five of the fourteen Chinese correspondences contained any appeal to social power and only one of the ten foreign correspondences contained even a moderate appeal to social power. Also, the
correspondences had only a small number and range of appeals to social power despite their often urgent requests. The most likely explanation for this might be the already existent working relationship between the writer and reader if they have already established a set of standard operational conventions. In such cases, the appeals could go largely unstated in

Correspondence 1

Aug. 20 1999
Dear Mrs. A,

It was very nice to talk to you this afternoon. Your warm heart and kindness impressed me so much. I do thank you very much for your attention to us.

I am one of the students and friends of Mr. B in China. Now I work in an infomercial trade media. First of all, let me make a brief introduction of our company. We are the biggest trade infomercial group in China. For years, we are determined to help Chinese enterprises open up global markets. We publish five quarterly trade magazines including China Advertising Gift & household, Hardwares [sic], Lighting, Electronic and Apparel on the Chinese product information as well as their relative markets in China. We convey Chinese product information through magazines, CD-ROM and On-Line Services. Every year, we also actively participate many major international exhibitions such as the coming Hawaii Gift Show.

As I mentioned just now, I can’t go and participate the Hawaii International Gift Show on Aug. 29-31 in the Hawaii Convention Center because it is not enough time for me to apply for the visa to Hawaii. And the Gift Show will be opened on Sunday, Aug 29-31, 10:00 am-5:00 pm. The Location of the Hawaii Convention Center is 1810 Kalakaua Avenue 96815, Honolulu Hawaii (island of Oahu). So would you do me a favor to attend/get someone to attend this gift show for us.

So I would like to clarify the following points:
1. ...
2. ...
3. ...
4. ...
5. ...

Thanks & regards,
Mr. D, Mr. E, Mr. F
most transactions. Also, to constantly remind the reader that, for example, failure to send the specified documents would damage their long term relationship could become very antagonistic very quickly.

Correspondence 1 was written by three employees of a large Chinese marketing and infomercial company based in Guangzhou. The recipient of the letter was an American with whom the company had been put in contact as someone who might be able to represent them at the trade show mentioned in the letter. However, it was understood on both sides that this business relationship would be limited to this single interaction. This letter was originally written as an English letter.

The first two paragraphs of Correspondence 1 are fairly easy to categorize as an appeal to guanxi since they make clear references to their primary relationship to the reader (their talk on the phone, her attention to them) and their secondary relationship through Mr. B. In fact, the appeal to guanxi is the only clearly made appeal in this correspondence (see Table 4). In essence, the writers are attempting to influence the receiver’s decision to perform a task for their company appealing to the good relationship they have as evidenced by the nice talk they had and the receiver’s warm heart, kindness and attention. The first sentence of the second paragraph also appeals to guanxi but in a different way. Instead of emphasizing the close relationship that the writers and receiver already share, this sentence appeals to their shared guanxi relationship with Mr. B. This use of a guanxi network is a common characteristic of Chinese communication (Hu & Grove, 1991).

Although the self-promotion in the remainder of the second paragraph is almost universal in Chinese business communication at any level, it is still somewhat more difficult to categorize than the earlier portions. The literature that I’ve examined does little to account
Table 4. Appeals to Chinese social power bases in Correspondence 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Base</th>
<th>Chinese Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Long Term Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Group Actualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Job Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to the Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent Power</td>
<td>☑ Appeals to Guanxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Organizational Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Non-Contractual Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Power</td>
<td>☐ Appeals to Expert Authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for using this sort of self-promotion as an means of influence. Rather, it seems to be either condemned as prideful (Yang, 1992) or even contrary to the Chinese practice of self-depreciation (Hu & Grove, 1991). This section might be evidence of what Linda Beamer (1994) would refer to as web thinking in that it sets the company's claims in a spatial context rather than making a claim in itself. If this is the case, it is possible that this section has no direct appeals itself. It is also possible that they seek to use expert power by making the argument that she should represent them because of their expertise in their field. However,
such an appeal would have to be a referent appeal since it seeks to increase affinity with the company. In this case, it would most likely be making an appeal to guanxi by offering the reader the opportunity to work with an industry leader. It also would not be considered an appeal to expert authority since the writer is not displaying the company’s expertise in making decisions about representing themselves at trade shows (i.e.: they do not say that the reader should represent them because they know more about her representing them than she does). In either case, whether this section is intended to stand as an appeal in itself or as support for its appeal to guanxi, it still seeks to influence the reader and its high position in the letter and the amount of space devoted to it suggest that the writers considered this to be an important component of the document’s intention of persuading the reader to assist the writers.

It seems possible that this section of the letter may be intended as an appeal to long term benefits (i.e., since our company is so strong we are in a position to provide unspecified rewards to you in the future for your current help). This, however, seems unlikely since both parties were aware that their business relationship would be limited to this single transaction. It is more likely that this section is being used as another appeal to guanxi since it is intended to create an affinity for the company which might attract the reader’s involvement. Unlike appeals to long term benefits, this appeal to guanxi would not necessarily require a promise of long term commitment or relationship. Rather, the writers might be attempting to create commitment to the company by boasting of its positive aspects. This would certainly be a legitimate appeal if the reader would be representing the company through an agent at the trade fair. The remainder of the letter does not seem to be trying to exert influence over the reader.
Of course, not all of the correspondences directly appealed to *guanxi*.

Correspondence 2 is an example of a Chinese correspondence in which a blatant appeal to the long term relationship is made rather than an appeal to *guanxi*.

**Correspondence 2**

Dear Mr. Xxx Xxx,
Thanks for your E-mail on May 8. After we discussed with the factory, considering your large quantity and our long-term cooperation, I am now quoting the best prices we can give you with very little profit:

...  
...  
...  
Pls help us persuade the customer to accept it. It would be very kind of you that you fax us the purchase order asap for our early production.
Thanks & Best Regards.
Xxx Xxx Xxx  
(italics added)

Correspondence 3 is different from the other two that have been discussed in that it does not seem to make any explicit appeals to any of the bases of social power. Although the writer is expressly asking the writer to take a specific action, the writer makes no mention or application of the social power that is held over the reader.

**Correspondence 3**

Dear Xxx,
While we appreciate you advising us your company needs some time to send TT to us. Please also understand that we also have to let our supplier to know exactly when they can get paid. When you told Xxx that TT to be next week, please specify which day during next week so that we can plan our payment to our supplier accordingly. Thank for you understanding.

Regards Xxx Xxx
In reality, this correspondence’s lack of appeals is not very surprising even though it seeks to elicit action from its reader. Rather, it would be very odd for businesspersons to make explicit appeals to their social power over their reader every time they wish to exert influence. Their readers would certainly become somewhat agitated by the constant reminders of their motivation for complying with the correspondent’s wishes.

The writer does, however, most likely hold some social power over the reader. As in any functional business relationship, it is likely that the reader of this sort of correspondence would feel obligated to meet with the writer’s request for a variety of reasons. The reader might, for example, feel a sense of duty to comply due to their contractual agreement. The reader may also feel driven to comply based on the concern for the long term relationship with the writer. But for the writer to make explicit appeals to these feelings would be “overkill” for such a routine correspondence as this one. Instead of making explicit appeals to social power in each correspondence, it makes sense that the majority of business correspondences more closely resemble Correspondence 3.

**Corporate Documents**

Corporate Document 1 is a letter from the president of Haier Group Company, one of China’s largest producers of household appliances. This letter was posted on the company internet site and was probably targeted towards foreign investors and buyers.

As opposed to Correspondence 1, which appeals almost exclusively to only one power base, Corporate Document 1 seems to appeal to several sources of social power (see table 5). The first paragraph works with the last to frame the letter as an appeal to the claimed tradition of the sea’s importance and Haier’s relation to that tradition (Haier literally
Haier is the sea

In China, the sea symbolizes understanding all knowledge and acceptance of new ideas. All waters flow into sea and the sea refuses nothing. Haier can be likened to the sea.

Waters flowing like soldiers from rivers immediately become one under the command of the sea. The sea has nothing to fear, and like the sea, Haier gains strength from its acquisitions and faces the future with confidence.

The sea devotes all its treasure to humans and requires nothing in return. The sea can only become stronger through its bounty and generosity.

Haier, like the sea, gains strength from its many talented employees who devote their knowledge to the company and in return, develop in their ability and experience. The progress of the organization is reflected in the competence and devotion of Haier employees.

A spirit of excellence exists within all Haier employees. Company achievements a result of the devotion and quality consciousness of all employees working together in an egalitarian and harmonious environment.

Thus Haier can be likened to the sea. Through devotion to society we will develop, through our relentless efforts we will grow, and like the sea we will exist forever.
Table 5. Appeals to Chinese social power bases in Corporate Document 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Appeals</th>
<th>Use in Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Long Term</td>
<td>“Haier gains strength from its acquisitions and faces the future with confidence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>“...we will develop...we will grow...and like the sea we will exist forever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Group</td>
<td>“The sea devotes all its treasure to humans and requires nothing in return. The sea can only become stronger through its bounty and generosity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actualization</td>
<td>“...many talented employees who devote their knowledge to the company and in return develop their ability and experience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The progress of the organization is reflected in the competence and devotion of Haier employees.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Guanxi</td>
<td>“…all employees working together in an egalitarian and harmonious environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Harmony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Appeals to Duty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Appeals to Job Security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Appeals to the Status Quo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Appeals to Luck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Appeals to Organizational Authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Appeals</th>
<th>Use in Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Appeals to Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Tradition</td>
<td>“Haier can be likened to the sea...and like the sea we will exist forever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Appeals to Non-Contractual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Appeals to Expert Authority</td>
<td>“The sea has nothing to fear...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…like the sea we will exist forever.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

be categorized as an appeal to organizational authority since the writer is not appealing to authority held over the reader. It could, however, be argued that this paragraph has some characteristics of an appeal to harmony since it describes the organizational harmony of the smaller units with the larger organizational structure.

Paragraph three seems to appeal to group actualization since it suggests that a business relationship would be mutually beneficial. Paragraph four could possibly be categorized as an appeal to harmony in the same way as paragraph two. However, it is more likely that this paragraph is making an appeal to guanxi since it emphasizes the value of the relationship with employees rather than the smooth relationship. In this way the writer increases his own value by accentuating the value of their relationships with employees. It also makes a reference to the group centeredness of the company to appeal to group actualization.
Paragraph five is both a similar appeal to _guanxi_ as in paragraph four ("A spirit of excellence exists within all Haier employees"), and a very clear appeal to harmony ("all employees working together in an egalitarian and harmonious environment").

Like Corporate Document 1, Corporate Document 2 is part of a large Chinese corporation's public information distribution. In Corporate Document 2’s case, the company is one of China’s largest internet services corporations providing strategy planning, web-based design, technology solutions, and digital marketing. This company is listed on NASDAQ and is employed by several of the largest Chinese and foreign businesses in China.

Corporate Document 2 comes from an information packet meant for potential clients. The complete document is twenty pages long and contains a mission statement, a company

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**Corporate Document 2 (italics added)**

*Are you ready for e-commerce?*

Selling your products or service is just one reason to apply e-commerce, you also can:

- **Set up your relationship network**
  Via Internet, you can contact millions of potential customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, while the cost is no more than sending out your name cards.

- **Enhance core business capability**
  You will find it is easier to access to the market by using your Intranet/Internet as it shortens procedures, makes data exchange more efficient, and reduces stocks.

- **Open new market**
  Get ready to deal with new *International partners* as Internet breaks through the geographical borders, allowing you to choose your *business partners* globally.

- **Communicate with consumers**
  A smart businessman knows that a *strong relationship* with his clients is the key to success. With e-commerce you can get the feedback of your new products from the targeted market in a short time without spending too much, and make the right strategy.
profile, a description of services provided, and a list of major clients (including General Motors, Procter & Gamble, Samsung, and several Chinese government and banking branches). The section shown here is a particularly interesting portion of the document which encourages readers to invest in e-commerce.

This document is interesting for a number of reasons. Probably the most interesting point is its strong emphasis on the relational benefits that will be incurred from investing in e-commerce. In fact, the highest ranked reason for a company to invest in e-commerce according to this section is to set up a relationship network with customers. The fourth section also states that “A smart businessman knows that a strong relationship with his clients is the key to success.”

This document is also notable because of its more narrow range of social power appeals (see Table 6). Unlike Corporate Document 1, which made appeals to all of the social power bases except coercion, this document is limited primarily to appeals to guanxi and long term benefits with none of the poetic appeals to harmony or tradition that were present in Corporate Document 1. This holds true throughout the entire document with the addition of appeals to the company’s expert power made by detailing their wide experience dealing with top companies.

The use of referent power appeals is another particularly interesting aspect of this document. First, in the above portion, the appeal to guanxi is not limited to the audience’s relationship to the company. Rather, an appeal is made to the audience’s guanxi relationship to their own customers and partners.
Table 6. Appeals to Chinese social power bases in Corporate Document 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Base</th>
<th>Chinese Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>✓ Appeals to Long Term Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Group Actualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>□ Appeals to Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Job Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to the Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent Power</td>
<td>✓ Appeals to Guanxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Power</td>
<td>□ Appeals to Organizational Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appeals to Non-Contractual Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Power</td>
<td>✓ Appeals to Expert Authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, in other parts of the document when the company lists some of its major clients, an appeal is being made to the audience’s potential association to the companies listed. This would not necessarily be a guanxi relationship since the audience would not expect any direct relationship to the companies listed by initiating a relationship with the document’s writers. However, the writers do create a positive affinity by offering the audience an opportunity to be in the same e-echelon as the companies listed.
CONCLUSIONS

Although my analysis of the existing literature on Chinese communication evidences the existence of the thirteen types of appeals to French and Raven’s social power bases in Chinese culture as a whole, this analysis of a small set of Chinese business documents can not necessarily prove the existence of these appeals in Chinese business culture. Further, study could potentially find that although particular appeals are present in some aspects of Chinese culture, they are not present in business culture. Although this study did not observe appeals to duty, job security, or age, the small sample size is prohibitive in drawing any conclusions from their absence. A larger study of particular genres of Chinese business communication could potentially find whether the occurrence of unusual claims is statistically significant in those genres.

However, some significant conclusions can be extrapolated from the document analysis in this study. One of the most noticeable patterns in the study is the fact that all of the corporate documents had more than one type of appeal while the majority of the correspondences did not have any. The most plausible explanation for this discrepancy lies in the audience for the two types of documents. Since the corporate documents have a very wide audience, it seems reasonable that they would seek to use a wide range of appeals to influence the largest number of people. On the other hand, since the correspondences were all being sent to a particular individual from an associate, it seems reasonable that the majority of the documents would follow the pattern of Correspondence 3 by making only implied appeals. On the other hand, rhetorical situations where the writer and reader are less
familiar with each other, as in Correspondence 1, might require an explicit appeal to ensure that the reader is influenced in the intended way.

It may also be significant to note that of the types of appeals, guanxi was referred to most often and long term benefits the second most often (see Table 3). The prevalence of appeals to guanxi could also prove to be significant if verified by a larger study. The wide use of appeals to guanxi in the sample documents should not be very surprising when considered in context of the importance of guanxi in Chinese culture. The guanxi system in China has been under heavy debate for decades and is seen as very controversial by American businesspeople. Still, it is currently a critical element of doing business with the Chinese and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. In a presentation to the Association for Business Communication, Linda Beamer (2001) gave the following three suggestions to help manage guanxi:

- Be prepared for the bureaucratic behaviors that result from guanxi on the part of your associates and within any joint-venture enterprise
- Develop strategies for countering the guanxi-based behaviors, including establishment of standards and norms, and accountability based on performance measures
- Continuously maintain face and nourish guanxi relationships that [are] highly dynamic. [These relationships] must be continuously reinforced given the mobility of the participant's position or institution

Finally, it is significant that only one out of ten correspondences written by foreigners make explicit Chinese appeals to social power. If foreigners do indeed use Chinese appeals at such a low rate it may be because they simply don't perceive such appeals as meaningful.
The fact that a small percentage of foreigners may use Chinese appeals also suggest either that some foreigners are consciously trying to make appeals that will be more meaningful to their Chinese readers or that some of the foreigners share common perceptions of what appeals are meaningful with the Chinese.

Although conscious understanding of Chinese appeals to social power has the potential to uncover some of the meaning of a business document, there is still a serious question about the validity that an American businessperson will give to the Chinese appeals. In other words, although an American could find an appeal meaningful, would s/he also be able to consider it appropriate and influential despite divergence from what the American businessperson considers valid and once an American has identified a document as containing an appeal to social power, what affect will the newly identified appeal have on the persuasive value of the document?

Although this paper exclusively examined appeals to social power in a sample of written documents, most businesspeople agree that the vast majority of Chinese business communication takes place through face-to-face interaction. As one businessman that I interviewed said, “Chinese businessmen don’t really think about [their writing] very much because they don’t think that it will really be good for anything. They think that most business will be done in person based on their relationship [with the other party]. And they’re right!” Although the appeals made in written and face-to-face communication are theoretically identical, it would be interesting to look at the ways in which face-to-face business communication appeals to social power differ from written communication in China and which appeals are more prevalent in each.
WORKS CITED


Beamer, L. (2001). Guanxi and ethics. From a presentation given at the conference of the Association for Business Communication, Atlanta, GA.


