

**Identity Constructions of Sales  
Managers: The Chinese Guanxi Milieu**

By

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**MA in Language Studies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis takes a social constructionist approach to study the discursive identity constructions of sales managers when they are engaged in different Guanxi with their customers. It explores the discursive identity constructions of the sales managers; the discursive resources that are drawn upon for these identities; the regulation and control of these identities through the discursive resources; the relationships of these identities.

Data is collected through participant observation and qualitative in-depth interviews of the sales managers in a company selling food additives in China. A discursive analytic approach informed by Critical Discourse Analysis is adopted for data analysis. Narrative analysis and metaphors analysis are also incorporated as part of this approach to explore sales managers' identity constructions.

It is found that sales managers construct two contextual and contradictory meta-identities: an emotional relational self when they describe their interaction or actually interact with their customers; an instrumental anti-relational self when they reflect upon their interaction with their customers. Four aspects of identities are constructed of the two meta-identities. Drawing upon discursive resources of familism, ethics, conformity and undirected reciprocity, four aspects of self are constructed of the emotional relational self: familial; ethical; conforming and undirected reciprocal aspects. In contradiction to these four aspects of self, drawing upon contradictory discursive resources of anti-familism, anti-ethics, adaptability and directed reciprocity, four aspects of self are also constructed of the instrumental anti-relational self: anti-familial; unethical; adaptive and directed reciprocal aspects. It is also found that these

two meta-identities and their aspects of identities relate to each other in three different ways: antagonistic, intertwining; and disguising.

This thesis has made four main contributions. Firstly, this thesis finds that the multiple contradictory identities constructed of the organizational members could be drawn upon a single discursive resource, rather than from multiple discursive resources as argued in literature. Secondly, this thesis addresses the current lack of research on relationships among identities in organization identity research, and conceptualizes the relationships among identities as: antagonistic; intertwining and disguising. Thirdly, this thesis found that the organizationally favourable outcomes could be achieved through the regulation and control of the individual's identities by an extra-organization discourse, coming from outside the organizations; rather than by the discourse within an organization as noted in literature. Fourthly, this thesis introduces an analytic practice from the discipline of linguistics, which is totally new to the field of organization studies, to focus on the originality and the culturally specific meanings of 'other language' data through a triple translation method, rather than the currently popular practice of using uni-lingual English language to deal with multi-lingual language data.

The author hereby declares that,  
except where duly acknowledged,  
this thesis is entirely her own work  
and has not been submitted  
in the same form for any degree  
to Lancaster University  
or to any other university.

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## GLOSSARY OF CHINESE WORDS

Chinese alphabet	Chinese characters	English meanings
<b>C</b>		
Cheng	诚	1. sincere, honest 2. real
Da wo	大我	big self
Du	度	degree
<b>G</b>		
Gan	感	to feel
Ganqing	感情	emotions/sentiments
Ge men yi qi	哥们义气	the righteous code of brotherhood
Guan	关	a door lock, gate way
Guanxi	关系	relationships
<b>H</b>		
Hai	害	harm
<b>J</b>		
Jia	家	home
Jia ren	家人	family members
Jiao xin	交心	exchange the heart
Jiang xin bi xin	将心比心	compare your heart with other's heart
Jie xin	戒心	heart are on guard
Jin	斤	a unit of weight (=1/2 kilogram)
<b>L</b>		
Li	利	benefit
Li	礼	propriety
Li hai	利害	gain and loss
Li shang wang lai	礼尚往来	courtesy demands reciprocity
Li wu	礼物	gift
Lian	脸	face
Liang	两	unit of weight (= 50 gram)
<b>M</b>		
Mian	面	face
<b>O</b>		
Open one' s xin	打开心	open your heart
<b>Q</b>		
Qing	情	affect, sentiment, emotions
<b>R</b>		

Ren	人	people, human
Ren	仁	humanheartedness, benevolence
Ren	任	responsibility
Renqing	人情	favour
<b>S</b>		
Sheng ren	生人	strangers
Shou ren	熟人	familiar people
<b>T</b>		
Tai	态	state
Tai du	态度	attitude
<b>W</b>		
Wai	外	outside
Wai ren	外人	outsider
Wu	物	thing
<b>X</b>		
Xi	系	linkage or a system of links
Xiao wo	小我	small self
Xin	心	heart and mind
Xin dao	心到	arrival of the heart
Xin ling	心领	accepting the good will
Xin tai	心态	attitude
Xin yi	心意	1. regard, kindly feelings 2. intention, purpose
Xin zhong	心中	in the heart, in the mind
Xinyong	信用	trust
<b>Y</b>		
Yi	义	righteousness, respect, justice
Yi	意	1. meaning, idea 2. wish, desire, intention 3. anticipate, expect 4.suggestion, hint, trace
<b>Z</b>		
Ze	责	responsibility
Ze ren	责任	responsibility
Zhi xin	知心	knowing the heart
Zi jia ren	自家人	one's own kith and kin
<b>S</b>		
Sheng	生	strange/raw



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As suggested by the title of the thesis, this is a study about the identity constructions of Chinese sales managers in Guanxi milieu. By identity, I mean the dynamic, contextual and relational projection of ‘who am I’ when one engages with different social relationships. Therefore, identity in this study is seen as always changing and fluid, rather than fixed and static. By ‘milieu’, I mean a person’s social environment and social setting. This choice of the word ‘milieu’, rather than ‘context’, mainly draws upon Mills (1959). The use of ‘milieu’ emphasizes more on the social aspects of an environment an individual is in (Mills (1959). Therefore, the word ‘milieu’ is used in this study.

In this chapter, I am going to give an introduction to this thesis as a result of my research journey during my doctoral studies. Firstly, I will talk about where the research journey started, what was my initial purpose or interest of the journey, where did the interest take me, how my interest changed with time, what shaped my thinking, what led to and shaped up my final research questions for this piece of study. Secondly, I will talk about how I conducted the study under the research question and goals in the research site. Finally, as a result of this research project, I will summarize the contents of the thesis through an introduction to each of the chapters in this thesis.

### **1.1 Research Background and Research Questions**

Where did my research journey begin? How did I start to have ideas for the current research? The start of this research project had something to do with my education background in language studies. Receiving systematic education in linguistics in both

my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, I became very interested in the studies on languages, especially the field of social linguistics where language is used as a way to explore social phenomenon. I was so fascinated with the reading of linguistic theories in this field, for example critical discourse analysis, and formed an idea that I wanted to apply it to real life problems. At that time, I accidentally came across a few articles which actually applied linguistic theories in management and organization studies. I decided to follow my interest and used language as a tool to explore real life issues in the business world.

At the very beginning, I chose business-to-business relationships in China as the field that I was going to put my effort into. As a Chinese student, the choice of this specific field was out of my own personal interest in my homeland. At the same time, my experience in UK also led me to this choice. In UK, I kept encountering into articles or seminars about business in China in UK. Doing business with the Chinese in China seemed to be getting global attention given the growing significance of China as an economic power. I read a few of these articles and found that 'Guanxi', a Chinese term which is usually translated as 'relationship' in English, receives a lot of attention and discussion from both researchers and practitioners. 'Guanxi', rather than its translation 'relationship', not only entered the scholarly articles but also became quite an established field for scholars in sociology, anthropology, and management and business studies.

As a linguistic student, I was quite amazed to find out that Guanxi, such a common practice in our daily life in China throughout thousands of year, provoked such a wide discussion in academia and industries. In their articles, Guanxi was said to be a very important factor in the success of business, and also was acknowledged to be very difficult to understand by foreigners who were doing business in China.

Interestingly, I shared the same opinions with these literatures in that I personally found it difficult to understand, even though compared with foreigners, I might be an expert since I am a Chinese. However, I found it difficult since we need to learn at a very young age how to do Guanxi with others and Guanxi learning does not stop at a certain age. It is a lifelong learning. For me, Guanxi is an art and learning Guanxi is like learning art. There is always room to improve a piece of art painting, and Guanxi was like this. There is no best way to do Guanxi, there is only a better way to do Guanxi. In Chinese social life, a lot of people could live happily without knowledge of art or with little knowledge of art. However, in China, lack of knowledge of Guanxi could result in many disadvantages, since the Chinese society was arranged based on relationship. Given the importance of Guanxi, there were still lots of Chinese people whose lack of sufficient knowledge of Guanxi made it difficult to understand and to learn it well. Like these people, I personally found it difficult to understand and to learn the art of Guanxi. This confusion in Guanxi became another driving force where I finally came to the point that I wanted to use language as a tool to research Guanxi in Chinese business-to-business relationships. I hoped that through this research journey, I could be able to understand the art of Guanxi better, though I did not expect that I could do it as cleverly as the Chinese people who had mastered the skills of Guanxi. That was how I started my research journey from an idea and finally put into practice.

After I made my decision, I began to read the Guanxi and business relationships literature. My thinking was gradually developed by these literatures and got narrowed down further. I started with the literature in business relationships and tried to explore how Guanxi was being researched in business relationships literatures.

It struck me when reading the business relationship literature that quite a lot of the Guanxi literature was mainly explored through the concepts in western business

relationships or concepts in Guanxi but with a seemingly equivalent one in the west; a very popular one might be the concept of 'trust' (127, 131 Kriz and Fang 2003, p. , Liu et al., 2008). Or Guanxi is understood through a few variables in a quantifiable way (Park and Luo 2001b, Shi et al., 2011). While I do think that the findings were interesting, I had a doubt whether the western concepts could really deepen the understandings of the fundamentals in Guanxi and whether Guanxi could be quantified just through a few variables. However, there were research attempts which explored Guanxi and connected it to the management and business literature quite well (Chow and Ng 2004, Parnell 2005). For example, Guanxi is explored in relation to the business success or business performance (Chung 2006, Millington et al., 2005 ), and to relationships marketing (Thomas and Arias 1998). Its characteristics are explored (Wang 2007b) and an aspect of Guanxi practice: the gifting practice is especially noted (Millington et al., 2005 ).

Despite the vast Guanxi literature in the field of management and business studies, I still felt that I was not satisfied by it. These literatures tended to explore Guanxi in a focused view: Guanxi in business practices. The effect of Guanxi on business practice seemed to be the main concern of these research attempts. The focus on the externalities of Guanxi in business field led me to explore Guanxi from a broader socio-cultural milieu: How Guanxi was practiced socially, not only in the business field; what was involved in Guanxi as a social practice. I saw these questions as important because Guanxi was embedded in the Chinese culture and business was just one sphere of Guanxi being practiced socially. Understanding Guanxi as a social practice, to me, brought a more thorough perspective on Guanxi practice in the business field.

Therefore, I started to shift my focus a bit to explore Guanxi in a different light, to

explore the indigenous concept of Guanxi. I turned to the two main sets of literatures in two different fields: sociology and anthropology literature about Guanxi, where I hoped I could have a more thorough and fundamental understanding of Guanxi and its practice in the Chinese society, without focusing on the cultural differences between Guanxi and relationships. These literatures did not fail me. I read a series of books of ethnographic studies on Guanxi (Kipnis 1997, Yan 1996, Yang 1994). These in-depth ethnographic studies explored Guanxi as a social phenomenon in villages and Guanxi was explored as the foundation of the society in which villagers lived (Yan 1996), rather than just instrumental webs of relationships as documented in business literature. Under such a milieu, the social practice of Guanxi was explored conceptually through a few concepts in Chinese cultures: renqing and ganqing. These two concepts are considered to be fundamental for Guanxi. While renqing, often translated as favour in English, has been discussed in the business literature in relation to gifting practice in Guanxi, the concept of ganqing which is often translated as emotions or sentiments, received almost no attention in the business literature. This relatively less discussed concept: ganqing, therefore helped to narrow down my research aim into an exploration of Guanxi through these concepts in a business context.

In order to further shape the final research question and also to find possible new themes which have not yet been documented yet in Guanxi, an initial study was conducted on ganqing and Guanxi in a Chinese business-to-business relationships context. This study involved interviews around 1.5 hours with 10 sales managers selling goods to their industrial customers, and a two-day shadowing of one of the managers to visit the industrial customers. The interviews were mainly conversational in nature and based on a few topics around ganqing and Guanxi. Findings were

analyzed. As expected, the theme of ganqing kept occurring in the sales managers' talk. However, what was unexpected was the theme of identities. Identities with the customers were most often mentioned by the sales managers when they talked about how they positioned themselves with the customers. This finding of identity theme paved the path to my final research questions. I started to look at the literature of identities.

Amongst others, Gergen's view on identity and relationships heavily influenced me. His view on identities took a social constructionist approach, seeing identity as fluid and situational and always constructed differently in different relationships. The close link between identity constructions and relationships provided a good perspective to explore my initial empirical findings on identity and Guanxi. In the data, the sales managers always mentioned that they need to be 'friends' with the customers and made them become 'good friends'. Some of the customers were addressed as 'brothers'. These three different identities were constructed under different closeness of the relationships. At the same time, Gergen's concept of identities was closely linked to discourse. For him, identities were always constructed through discourse. This focus on relationship, identities and language matched the data very well. I therefore followed Gergen's view and explored how his theory was being used in literatures.

The identities literature which was influenced by Gergen was explored. Two areas especially attracted my attention: identity work and identity regulation. Identity construction of organizational members was therefore seen as a power effect of, and the result of, the regulation by the dominant organizational discourse. This made me see my initial interview data in another light: how sales managers were regulated by the organizational discourse and produced as organization-favoured individuals under

the milieu of Guanxi. Did Guanxi have a shaping effect on the identities of the sales managers or did only the organizational discourse have the shaping effect? Or was it a joint effort of the two discourses? The initial finding showed that sales managers seemed to draw upon non-organizational discourse for identities construction (e.g. friends, brother), but achieved the goals for the organization. This counters current literature on identities regulation that seemed to suggest that identities were regulated mainly by discourse within the organizations to produce organizational outcome. This mis-match of the findings and the literature could be a possible gap in literature worth researching. It was this finding of the gap that drove me to change the focus of my research from researching Guanxi in business-to-business relationships to researching identity of the organisational members under the milieu of Guanxi in business-to-business relationships.

A more detailed exploration of the identity literature also suggested two other gaps: contradictions in the identities and relationships among identities. In the data findings, sales managers all emphasized the construction of friend identity with the customers, but at the same time, talking to me, they denied that they were real friends with them. This contradiction in their accounts was also documented in the literature, though still with very limited coverage. The work of Clarke et al. (2009) interested me most. In this paper, three pairs of contradictory identity constructions of the organizational members were identified and the discursive resources the identities drew upon were also discussed. Given the limited literature on contradictory identities, and the cultural milieu of Guanxi, contradictory identities of the sales managers could be another area to explore further. Inspired from my reading on identities, I was surprised that the identity was researched from the varieties of the identity construction, but how did these various identities assumed by the same person relate to each other? The nature

of these relationships still remains very much unknown, except for Carroll and Levy's (2008) study. A mutually constitutive relationship was found between the identities constructed by the same organizational members. An appreciation of these gaps in the literature as inspired by the reading mentioned above, finally shaped my research goals and the detailed questions that I would like to explore for this piece of research under a Guanxi milieu.

Inspired by different areas of research at different stages and the empirical findings, this research aims to explore the various identity constructions of organizational members in a Chinese Guanxi business relationships context. To achieve this aim, the research is thus guided through the following questions:

1. What identities do sales managers construct when they are engaged in different Guanxi with their customers?
2. What discursive resources are drawn upon for the multiple identity constructions?
3. How do these discursive resources regulate the identities of the sales managers?
4. How do these multiple identities relate to each other ?

In order to answer these questions, empirical data was collected. The research site was located in the sales department of a food additive company. The main responsibility of the sales managers was to sell food additive to their industrial customers. During this process, the business relationships between the two companies were embedded within the personal relationships (Guanxi) of the two. In total, seven weeks were spent in the sales departments of the company. Consent was given by the General Managers and all the sales managers to digitally record the conversation in the office unless I was



requested to stop. During the 7 weeks, I spent around 3 weeks on two different business trips, shadowing the sales managers on their visit to the customers. Therefore, data was collected through observation in the office setting and on the business trips; interviews with a purpose; informal conversations; and research notes. Later these data were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. A systematic analysis informed by critical discourse analysis was used to analyze the data. Metaphor analysis and narrative analysis were incorporated as part of the approach. The findings of the data were discussed in relation to the gaps in the literature to identify the contributions. These different stages of the research project were summarized through different chapters and are presented in the next section.

## **1.2 The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is produced as a result of my research project and is structured through the different chapters, which highlight systematically in an academic manner the processes of this journey.

**Chapter 2 presents a literature review on Identity.** This chapter is a preparation to address the research questions. Therefore, it focuses upon: identity work; identity regulation; relationships of identities; and language-based studies in organization research. The aim of reviewing these literatures is to locate the current research project within the specific fields in identity research, to map out the current understandings in these specific fields of knowledge, and more importantly to foreshadow how this research may add to, contradict and extend the current understanding of these fields.

**Chapter 3 reviews the literature on Guanxi.** This chapter is also a preparation to

address the research questions. It contextualizes the current study by providing the socio-cultural milieu that it is embedded within. Therefore it mainly reviews: the notion of Guanxi; the five hierarchical relationships in Chinese society, the gifting practice, the notion of Chinese face, Confucian ethics and Ganqing. Chapters 2 and 3 pave the way to answer the research questions.

**Chapter 4** provides a theoretical understanding of the **research methodologies** that are used to address the research questions. It mainly focuses on three areas: critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis and metaphor analysis. Therefore, it also shows how these three methodologies could be incorporated within a critical discourse analysis framework to guide the research processes and especially shows how it informs a systematic method of data analysis for this study.

**Chapter 5 deals with research methods.** The aim of this chapter is to present empirically: how the research is being conducted in the primary research site and how the data is being analyzed. Therefore, it mainly focuses on: the research site and its access; two research methods used to collect empirical data (participant observation, qualitative in-depth interviews); the role of the researcher in the data collection; transcription and translation of Chinese data into English data; and analysis of data. This chapter prepares for the different themes in the data analysis chapters.

**Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 are the data analysis chapters.** They provide empirical analysis based on the research questions. The different chapters focus on analysis of different aspects of two mutually contradictory identities. Chapter 6 analyzes the aspects of the contradictory identities drawn upon discursive resources of: familism and anti-familism. Chapter 7 analyses the aspects of the contradictory identities which draw upon ethics and anti-ethics. Chapter 8 analyses the aspects of the contradictory

identities which draw upon the conformity and instrumentality. Chapter 9 analyses the aspects of the contradictory identities which draw upon undirected reciprocity and directed reciprocity.

**Chapter 10 is the discussion chapter.** It mainly summarizes the findings in the analysis chapters and, based on this, it deepens the analysis further through looking at the relationships among these different aspects of identities. Three different forms of relationships are found among these aspects of identities.

Chapter 11 discusses the **theoretical contributions and conclusions** of this study based on the data analysis. The contribution will be presented in relation to the literatures identified in the literature review section. In addition, the methodological contribution will be highlighted. Then I will move on to the discussion of managerial implications based on this study; the implications of the research. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and point out the avenue for future research.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This chapter is to explore the literature on identities in the field of organization studies. To start with, I explore a social constructionist view on identity which inspires this field of research. This is to establish the concept of identity as a social construction through discourse, and to clarify the claim related to reality of this research: there are multiple realities, rather than one single reality. Building upon this idea of contextual discursive identities, I review the literature on organization identity studies having a take on this approach. Firstly, I briefly review the functional approach to identity in organization in order to differentiate my research project from this approach. Secondly, the literature review moves on to the interpretive approach on identity, in which this study is mainly located. Three themes in this area are reviewed: coherent identities, fragmented identities and contradictory identities. Through this, I position my research in relation to other research attempts in this area. Thirdly, I review the critical approach literature on identity study. By this, I try to illuminate identity as an effect of power exercised through discourse within organizations. Then, I continue with the literature on the current theorization on relationships among identities. Fourthly, I review language-based identity research from a methodological perspective, questioning the dominant English language-based methodologies, and call for research in foreign languages.

### **2.1 A Social Constructionist View on Identity**

A social constructionist approach is adopted for this research project. I will explore the definition of social constructionism first. In line with this approach, the social

constructionist view on identity research and the role language plays in identity construction will be talked about later.

There does not seem to be a single and definitive definition for social constructionism. A pivotal idea in social constructionism is 'to rethink virtually everything we have been taught about the world and ourselves' (Gergen 2009, p. 3) During this rethinking process, a critical stance will be taken to approach the taken-for-granted way of understanding the world, which challenges the 'reality' or 'truth' that is based on the objective, unbiased understanding of the world (Burr 1995). For a social constructionist, the world could be understood differently by different people and what is real is a subjective social construction by people. What is real for one person is different from what is real for another person and 'nothing is real unless people agree that it is' (Gergen 1999, p. 4). Therefore, there are many subjective realities rather than a singular, objective reality.

Another feature which defines social constructionism focuses on the 'historical and cultural specificity', that is, 'the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific' (Burr 1995, p. 3). The ways of understanding always change with the change of time, and are dependent upon the social and economic arrangements in that culture as well (Burr 1995).

The third feature is that our common ways of understanding the world are constructed among people in social interactions in the course of social life (Burr 1995). Social process and social interaction are therefore emphasized in the production of the versions of knowledge. The fourth feature emphasizes social actions, that is, each

possible social construction of the world also brings ‘a different kind of action from human being’ (Burr 1995, p. 5).

These four key features are summarized by Burr (1995) as the most important assumptions underlying social constructionism. Therefore, social constructionism is characterized by the social constructions of multiple realities, the historical and cultural take on realities; realities as sustained in social interactions between people and realities, and different social actions brought by different realities.

Given the focus on multiple realities or versions of knowledge, understandings of the world are central to this approach. Discourse, plays an important role in this social construction of the knowledge of the world, including ourselves. Discourse is difficult to define, but Parker gives a working definition of it as ‘a system of statements which constructs an object’(Parker 1992, p. 5). Discourses ‘constitutes the social world by bringing certain phenomena into being, including objects of knowledge, categories of social subjects, forms of “self”, social relationships and conceptual framework; (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004, p. 154). Therefore, ‘the things that make up the social world –including our very identities –appear out of discourse...without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand social reality, our experiences, or ourselves’ (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 2).

Drawing upon social constructionism on identity research, a constructionist view on identity is that ‘there is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed’ (Gergen 1991, p. 139). Identity is temporary and dynamic, rather than fixed and static. This social constructionist self views identity construction as relational and as contextual to others. It is always ‘continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships’ (Gergen 1991, p. 139).

Thus identities are ‘increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions’ (Hall 1996, p. 4). This study also takes on this social constructionist idea on identity, assuming a fragmented, incoherent and dynamic conceptualisation of identity.

## **2.2 Key Perspectives on Identity in Contemporary Organizational Research**

Identity research has been a popular topic and has gained long-standing attention among organization scholars. Identity research in organizations is conducted with different philosophical approaches. In general, Alvesson et al. (2008) patterns the current identity scholarship in organization studies through the following three approaches: functional, interpretive and critical approaches. These three approaches have different analytical focus on the social construction of self and produce three different areas of research in identity research in organizations: social identity, identity work and identity regulation or control (Alvesson et al., 2008). Here, the categorization of the literature by Alvesson et al. (2008) will be adopted to review the literatures in these fields further.

### **2.2.1 Functional approach: Social Identity**

Identity studies following a functionalist approach seem to dominate current management research. It takes a technical cognitive interest in ‘how identity and identification may hold an important key to a variety of managerial outcomes and thus the potential to improve organizational effectiveness’ (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 8).

Functionalist identity studies are heavily drawn on social identity theory (henceforth: SIT) and its sister approach, self-categorization theory (henceforth: SCT) (Ashforth et al., 2008). SIT studies 'how people understand and position themselves and others in terms of social group categories' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 13). Social identity is therefore defined as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel 1978, p. 63).

SIT/SCT therefore defines the individuals through their identifications with a collective or a particular group and this conceptualisation of social identity heavily influence the functionalist identity studies in organization studies (Foreman and Whetten 2002). Instead of considering the question of 'who are we', functionalist identity studies address the question of 'who are we as an organization'. Therefore organizational identity is seen as a 'subtype of social identification' (Foreman and Whetten 2002, p. 619) and is regarded as 'the degree to which a member defines himself or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization' (Dutton and Dukerich 1991, p. 39).

Organization is mainly treated as a source of identification in organizational identification. Drawn upon the cognitive framework of SIT/SCT, a relatively stable view on identity is adopted for organizational identity, and in which case, identity is seen as a state of 'being' (Alvesson et al., 2008). However, there are other streams of identity research in organization studies that do not situate identification 'in cognitive terms', but 'as a symbolic, rhetorical and/or discursive process' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 14), which will be the focus of this thesis. These other two streams of identity studies: identity work following an interpretive approach and identity regulation following a critical approach will be discussed in the following sections.



### **2.2.2 Interpretive Approach: Identity Work**

A second approach to study identity is an interpretive approach (Alvesson et al., 2008). Working within the interpretive approach, an individual's self-identity is viewed as a 'reflexive project that the individual works on' in everyday social life, 'develops over time' and in which the individual 'seeks a temporal coherence' (McAdams 1996, p. 297). As Giddens suggests: 'self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted reflexively by the agent' (1991, p. 53). The individual is viewed as engaged in constructing a relatively coherent and consistent self-identity (Watson 2008) across time. In order to make sense of this self-identity as it develops over time, narrative of the self-identity is constructed which integrates 'the individual's reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future, rendering a life-in-time sensible in terms of beginnings, middles and endings' (McAdams 1996, p. 298). Therefore, to construct a coherent self-identity is to 'keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens 1991, p. 54).

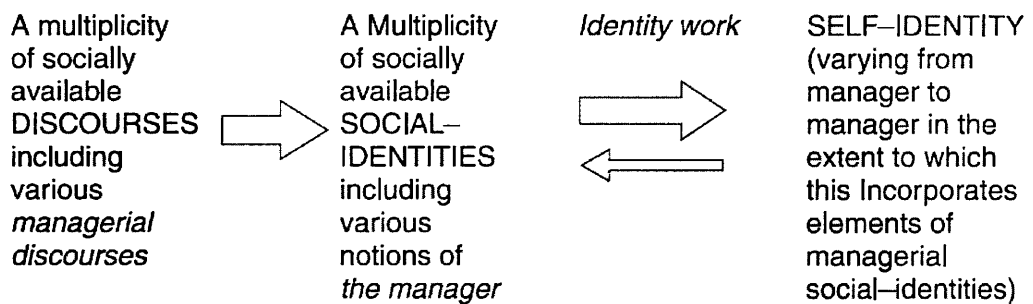
This interpretive approach focuses on 'how people craft their identities through interaction, or how they weave "narratives of self" in concert with others and out of the diverse contextual resources within their reach' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 8). This approach influences another field of organization research in identity: identity work, focusing on the process of the individuals' identity construction in their attempt to craft a coherent, distinctive and positively valued identity (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Within this field, individuals are seen as engaged in an ongoing process of identity construction (Beech 2008). The concept of identity work is adopted in this field of research as an important conceptual lens to understand this ongoing process of identification. Though there seems to be no consensus on the notion of identity work and though it is being used in informal manners by many different authors, it is

defined formally by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) as an individual's constant crafting of his identity through actively engaging 'in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, p. 116). Within this process, identity work is the interpretive activity involved in crafting a sense of self to answer the question of who am I (Sturdy et al., 2006). Individuals are therefore also seen as identity workers, engaging in an ongoing process of identity construction (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). This process-oriented identity work also reflects the dynamic and fluid view of identity: identity is in a state of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Ybema et al., 2009).

This formal conceptualisation of identity work has been very influential and adopted by many researchers. However some scholars point out limitations in this definition and define it in another manner. Watson (2008), for example, argues that the emphasis of Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) conceptualisation is on the internal aspect of identity and neglects the external aspect of identity. For Watson (2008), the external identity is a missing link between the self-identity construction and the discourse available as 'inputs' for the self-identity. In his view, there exists an external identity which is treated as 'elements of discourse' and 'as cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be' (Watson 2008, p. 127, 131). This external identity draws from the available discourse and functions as 'inputs' to the individuals' internal identity, which is 'the individual's own notion of who and what they are' (Watson 2008, p. 131). Therefore, instead of Alvesson and Willmott (2002) two-step view of identity construction: from discourse to internal identity, Watson (2008) proposes a more detailed three-step view of identity construction: from discourse to the defining of socially available external identities to internal identities.

In his view, the internal identity is treated as the self-identity in Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) definition. The external identity is treated as the social-identities. Watson (2008) argues that his concept of social-identity is different from the concept of social identity in social identity theory in that social-identities are a discursive construction, 'cultural phenomena, external to selves', and are as 'inputs to self-identities (mediated by identity work)' 'rather than an element of self-identity' (Watson 2008, p. 131). Identity work is argued to be located between the social-identity and the self-identity. Therefore, as mentioned above, Watson's (2008) view of the three-step relationships between socially available discourse, social-identity and self-identity is summarized as below:



**Figure 1: A 'three step' view of the relationship between managerial and other discourses**

(Watson 2008, p. 128)

Based on the above conceptualisation of social-identity, self-identity and their relationship with socially available discourse for identity construction, Watson (2008) proposes another definition of identity work, incorporating analytically both the internal self-identity and the external social-identities:

*'Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain in the various milieu in which they live their lives' (Watson 2008, p. 129).*

Watson's concept of identity work has been shared by other scholars in an implicit manner. Snow and Anderson's (1987 in Kreiner and Hollensbe 2006) conceptualisation of identity work also addresses the issue of social-identity and with emphasis on the relationships between the individual and the social context. Thus identity work is defined by them as the "range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" derived from the social identity (Snow and Anderson 1987 in Kreiner and Hollensbe 2006, p. 1032).

The notion of identity work (Watson 2008) will be adopted in this thesis to show how the socially available discourse in a Chinese organization provides many socially available social-identities as inputs for the individual's self-identity constructions. Therefore, in the following sections, identity work scholarship: the process of identity construction, will be reviewed in detail through consideration of coherence, fragmentation and contradiction in the process of the individual's identity construction.

### **2.2.2.1 Coherence and Fragmentation in Self-identity Construction**

Initiating 'from an interest in understanding how individuals deal with their complex and often ambiguous and contradictory experiences of work and organization', identity work focuses on 'the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in

constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinctive and positively valued' (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 14-15). The specific ongoing process of individual identity construction involved in this mental activity becomes a focus in identity work research (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003).

The coherent, distinctive and positively valued identity construction is always relational to different others in social interaction (Gergen 1994). Coherent identity is studied in relation to the self-other identity talk, in which the individual's self-identity is often defined by the other (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). This element of otherness for the self definition is important, since the self-identity could be constructed through establishing similarities and differences with the other in interaction (Ybema et al., 2009). Identity work becomes a process of establishing who one is and who one is not in relation to others (Watson 2009a). This often involves discursive positioning of the coherent and distinctive self within the self-other identity talk (Garcia and Hardy 2007). The discursive positioning 'highlights the social embeddedness of discursive identity because a particular type of self is used only in relationship with, and by comparison to, others' (Hopkinson 2001, p. 428).

This is 'a process of differentiation, a description of one's own group and simultaneously as separate from the others' (Wodak 1996, p. 26) and the other is constructed as different and could be less desirable, powerful and acceptable than the self (Garcia and Hardy 2007). Such a process relates to the construction of positively valued self, which involves a positive-self and negative-other positioning.

This positive-self and negative-other discursive positioning and identity construction is shown through the linguistic binary (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004). The positive-self identity often involves an element of moral uprightness and the identity work for the

coherent positive self is closely connected to 'a process of establishing to oneself and others that one is a good person'(Watson 2009a, p. 446). For example, in Essers and Benschop's (2009) paper, they discuss how muslim female entrepreneurs from different countries negotiate their identity as coherent good muslims to others within an interaction of gender, ethnic and religious identities in an entrepreneurial context. Clarke et al. (2009) also show that managers author moral identities for themselves in front of their friends who lost their jobs in times of redundancy.

The coherent, distinctive and positively valued identity established in the self-other talk is context-dependent. The coherent identity could be more continuous in stable settings, but it could be disrupted by the ambiguous context in the organization (Watson 2008). Faced with ambiguity and complexity in organization, individuals have self-doubt, self openness, and uncertainty, which discontinue the coherence of identities and result in the fragmentations of identity (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

The co-existence of the identity fragmentation and coherence are often studied in relation to organizational discourse in organization studies. Here, the term organizational discourse refers to 'structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artefacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed' (Grant and Hardy 2004, p. 6). In this field of study, organizations are viewed as 'social collectives', which 'exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse' and discourse 'is the principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are' (Mumby and Clair 1997, p. 181). Organizational members' 'attitudes and behaviours could be shaped and influenced by the (organizational) discursive practice in which they engage and to which they are

exposed or subjected' (Grant et al., 2004b, p. 3). Therefore, an individuals' identity is shaped by the organizational discourse as well. Identity coherence occurs when individuals draw upon the dominant organizational discourse for their identity constructions. However, individuals may also draw upon many different discourses for identity construction and fragmented identities are therefore constructed.

The work of Collinson (2003) shows the co-existence of coherent and fragmented identities in organizations. The study illustrates how an individual in a surveillance-based organization overcomes insecurities in the workplace through not only constructing a 'conformist self' which conforms to the dominant organizational discourse, but also a dramaturgical self which rationalizes the dominant organizational discourse and a resistant self which is resistant to the dominant organizational discourse. The co-existence of identity coherence and identity fragmentation have been analyzed in many discursive identity studies (Coupland 2004, Driver 2009, Whittle 2005).

The identity coherence and fragmentation is studied in relation to different dominant organizational discourses. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) explore the managerial identity work of a senior manager in a high-tech company and illuminate the fragmentation as well as coherence in the interplay between organizational discourse and the self-identity. The senior manager is confronted with four different organizational discourses: globalization; creativity; network; and management control discourses. Coherence is found in her stable, coherent self-identity construction which coheres with the creativity and network discourses. However, fragmentation is also found when her coherent self-identity is in tension with the other two discourses: globalization and management control discourses. Therefore, coherence is found when

the manager's self-identity conforms to some organizational discourse, but fragmentation is found in her opposition to other organizational discourses.

Identity coherence and fragmentation are also studied in relation to the different aspects of a dominant organizational discourse. Identity coherence occurs in conforming to certain aspects of the dominant discourse, and fragmentation occurs in opposing other aspects of the dominant discourse. For example, Coupland (2004) explores the individual identities of the graduate trainees in retail sectors in relation to the dominant career discourse. It is found that individuals draw upon careers discourse of 'career plan' as resource for identity in interaction with the researcher. However, they also find the restricted nature of the 'career plan' problematic and lacking in flexibility. Career denial is also constructed through 'referring to planning as an undesirable concept', though 'career planning is then legitimised as a company-oriented process' (Coupland 2004, p. 528). The dominant career discourse is conformed to and subverted at the same time in the graduate trainees' accounts of identity.

Identity coherence and fragmentation are also explored in relation to issues of gender. Identity coherence occurs in individuals observing the gendered norms in their response to the dominant organizational discourse, and fragmentation occurs in the many different responses to the organizational discourse. For example, Barry et al. (2006) investigate the identity constructions of university academics in the context of the new public management in UK and Sweden. As response to the discourse of new public management, university academics construct six different types of identities. Fragmentation of identities occurs among the six identity types constructed in discourse. However, constrained by the gender characters, female and male academics observe some dominant gender norms in making choices about their identity and these



identity choices also bring the gendered consequences. Therefore, identity coherence is found in observing the gender norms in the dominant discourse, but fragmentation is found in the six identity constructions which unsettle the dominant discourse.

Always accompanying the theme of identity coherence and fragmentation is the theme of reflexivity in empirical discursive identity studies (Driver 2009). The role of the researcher in the identity study has been reflected upon by the researchers themselves in the discursive studies. Therefore, coherence, fragmentation and reflexivity are often seen as a 'set piece' in identity research (Driver 2009, p. 488). Thomas and Davies (2005) explore the managerial identity constructions of the public service professionals in relation to the discourse of new public management, specifically in exploring the 'meanings individuals ascribe to the discourse of New Public Management (NPM) and their positioning within these meanings' (p. 683). In their study, coherence and fragmentation are both found in the professional's identities relative to this discourse. Later, they reflect upon the interview setting as a social event where the researcher and the researched subjects (Thomas and Davies, 2005). 'Recognizing that meaning is constituted in language and social action', the researchers' interpretations of these meanings are 'constructions of these meanings and therefore a construction of the construction' made by the researched (Thomas and Annette 2005, p. 688). Other researchers also reflect extensively on their identity studies (Jorgenson 2002, Ward and Winstanley 2003). For example, the identity of the researched is seen as a co-construction between the researcher and the researched in interaction (Ward and Winstanley 2003) since the researcher might position the researched in certain subject positions and ask for an account of the researched (Coupland 2004).

Authors' reflexivity, coherence and fragmentation in the process of identification have been widely documented by scholars in identity work research. There is another area of research in identity work which begins to receive attention from identity scholars: contradiction in identity. In the next section, I will review the literature in this relatively neglected area of research.

### **2.2.2.2 Contradiction in Identity**

Recognizing that individuals are able to tell many different stories to different people in different contexts and at different times (Gergen 1992), people are considered as having a collection of rather disconnected versions of self-identities (Clarke et al., 2009). In the organizational context, individuals could have 'several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities (identity positions) rather than one stable, continuous and secure, manager identity' (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, p. 1165). However, as pointed out by Clarke et al. (2009), the contradictory identities receive relatively less attention than the coherent and fragmented identities in discursive identity studies. While contradiction in the accounts of organizational life is recognized as important for our understanding of organizations, and 'in organization studies literature little attention is paid to teasing out these contradiction and subjecting them for critical analysis' (El-Sawad et al., 2004, p. 1179).

Before going on to review the literature of contradiction in identities, it is necessary to explore the notion of contradiction in organization research and differentiate contradiction from coherence and fragmentation. According to the Cambridge Learners' Dictionary (GOOD 2008 ), contradiction is defined as 'when something is the complete opposite of something else or very different from something else, so that

one of them must be wrong' (GOOD 2008 , p. 304). Coherence is defined as 'when the parts of something fit together in a natural or sensible way' (GOOD 2008 , p. 264). Since the definition of fragmentation is not given in the dictionary, the word fragment is chosen here for illustration of the meaning. The word fragment could be used both as a noun and a verb. When used as a noun, it is defined as 'a small piece or a part, especially when broken from something whole' (GOOD 2008 , p. 566); when used as a verb, it is defined as 'to break something into small parts or to be broken up in this way' (GOOD 2008 , p. 566). From these dictionary definitions of these three words, differences among them could be drawn: coherence focuses on the unity, the connectedness of the things; fragmentation focuses on incompleteness and the broken nature of the things; while contradiction focuses on the opposite nature of things. Taking these definitions into identity studies, the research in contradictory identities engages with an analytic interest on the oppositions of identities construction for individuals, which is surely different from that of coherent and fragmented identities. However, in contrast to the dictionary definition of contradiction which also focuses on the true or false dichotomy and the possibility for one to cancel out the other, the contradictory identity studies do not share an objective view on realities as true or false. Instead, the oppositions are both treated as true and as a discursive construct, reflecting their two different versions of realities in discursive studies in different contexts.

Contradictions occurring in accounts of organizational life are summarized by EI-Sawad et al. (2004) as consisting of three types depending on the location of their occurrence: 'between stated organizational policy versus the experience of practice' (p. 1180); 'between the account of one organizational member versus the account of the other' (p. 1180); and 'when one individual holds simultaneously two (or more)

conflicting beliefs' (p. 1189). The contradictory identities occur in the third venue: within the same individuals' account.

The contradictory identities as occurring within the same individual's account are analyzed by different authors either as an explicit focus (Clarke et al., 2009, Whittle 2005) or as a description without being the focus of the study (Collinson 2003, Musson and Duberley 2007, Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, Thomas and Linstead 2002, Wajcman and Martin 2002).

In a suggestive manner, self-identities are viewed as contradictory, multiple and diverse identity narratives in the following studies. Collinson (2003) explores the insecurity in the production of workplace selves and argues that conformist, dramaturgical and resistant selves are constructed by the individuals as survival strategies. Thomas and Linstead (2002) explore the identity constructions of middle managers and find that managers draw upon a variety of discourses for identity construction, including 'discourses of professionalism and expertise, gender, performance and commitment, and the public sector ethic' (p.86) in different ways and contexts for their identity construction. The tension and contradictions within and between these discourses are also revealed in their identity constructions. Wajcman and Martin (2002) also find contradiction in the two identities that women managers author. In the context of the new capitalism discourse, women managers draw upon this discourse to construct an un-gendered identity to describe their career identities and work life. When they describe their private identities and domestic life, they find this discourse of new capitalism is problematic and therefore author a gendered identity.

Contradiction is treated as more explicit in the study of Musson and Duberley (2007). These authors study how a group of supervisors in a manufacturing organization are controlled by a participation discourse and the role of identity in this process. Four different responses of the supervisors to this discourse are found. Supervisors conform to this dominant participation discourse in a formal setting through incorporating it into identity construction, but the other three responses also show that they resist this discourse through drawing upon three other competing bases of identifications: participation as opportunity, as threat and as irrelevant (Musson and Duberley 2007).

These above studies tend to focus on how individuals as recipients of the organizational discourse deal with the contradictions within inconsistent and incompatible organizational discourses imposed upon them, while Whittle's (2005) study highlights how individuals as producers of organizational discourse construct their identities when they are engaged in implementing the discourse they produce (Whittle 2005). Whittle's (2005) studies how management consultants manage their role as producers and practitioners of the organizational discourse: flexible work arrangement which they produce and sell to their client company. They identify with this discourse in front of their clients, but dis-identify with it and contradict it when they practice it in their own company.

Contradiction becomes an explicit focus in the study of Clarke et al. (2009), as these authors argued that 'still less research has been conducted on the dualities inherent in managers' accounts of their selves' (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 324). They look at how managers construct themselves in times of redundancy. Three sets of mutually antagonistic discursive resources are identified and are deployed by the managers to author their different versions of selves. Therefore managers describe themselves as

emotional and unemotional, professional and unprofessional, business-oriented and people-oriented (Clarke et al., 2009).

The presence and absence of emotions is highlighted in organizational studies of identity, including, as highlighted above, that of Clarke et al (2009). It is worthwhile at this point therefore to note how emotions will feature in this thesis. Here I shall be referring to emotionality as the construction of a level of emotional engagement rather than considering emotions as ‘feelings’ (Grandey 2000) and ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild 1983). This differs therefore from the approach more generally taken to emotions in organisational studies and consequently I do not review that aspect of the literature here.

In view of the identity work literature in identity coherence, fragmentation and contradiction, two gaps could be identified. Firstly, while current literature on identity coherence focuses on a positive-self and negative-other identity talk, little research is conducted on the aspect of self-depreciative identity talk, as also pointed out by Ybema et al. (2009). Secondly, there is still little research with explicit focus on the contradictory aspects of individuals’ self-identities, especially in a non-western cultural context. The contradictory identity work and its specific processes of identity formation call for further research. Linked to the gap in contradictory identities, research literature tends to argue that the contradictory identities draw upon contradictory and incompatible discourses available to them. This provokes a question to me: is there a possibility that multiple contradictory identities are produced by the same discourse or do the different identities always draw from multiple discourses?

### **2.2.3 Critical Approach: Identity Regulation or Control**

Another important area in identity studies is identity regulation or identity control. In this area of inquiry, the concept of identity is mainly influenced by the critical approach which emphasizes the role of power and control in the making of individual identities. This conceptual emphasis of identity argues for a power-laden political identity formation and challenges the assumption held in that of identity work and Social Identity Theory research where identity formation is seen as a power-free process and individuals freely engage in their identity construction (Alvesson et al., 2008). Under such a critical theoretical conceptualisation, self is seen as ‘the target of managerial control’ (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 15).

Organizational control literature has been criticized for its preoccupation with the external aspects of control, i.e. the impersonal and behaviour features, with little interest on the internal aspects: ‘how meaning, culture or ideology is articulated by and implicated in structural configurations of control’ (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 619). Since ‘modern business of management is often managing the “insides” – the hopes, fears, and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviours directly’ (Deetz 1995, p. 87), identity control becomes a strategy for the normative control, aiming at the thoughts, feelings and understanding of the employees (Thornborrow and Brown 2009). Therefore, identity control involves ‘how employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives’ (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 619).

Studies of identity regulations are also inspired by the idea of subjectification and disciplinary power. Deriving from this interest, identity regulation is concerned with how organizations exercise disciplinary power through the different disciplinary techniques (e.g. performance appraisal) to produce certain subject positions for the

employees (Thornborrow and Brown 2009). Subjugated to these positions, individuals' notion of self is so conjoined with the organization's values and goals that other alternatives are removed (Sewell and Wilkins 1992 in Thornborrow and Brown 2009).

In other studies of identity regulation, reflexivity plays a stronger role in the identifications of the individuals. Identity regulation is seen as that which 'encompasses the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 625) Individuals are not only the recipients of the management inspired discourse, but able to draw upon a range of resources for identification, including life history, desires and aspirations(Thornborrow and Brown 2009). Identity regulation is therefore an active joint effort of the individuals and the organization, rendering a 'self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourse' (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 625) and with the belief of securing individuals' commitment, and loyalty to the organizations' objective (Thornborrow and Brown 2009).

In this reflexive process of identification, the idea of discursive resource is very much employed. Discursive resource is drawn from social practice (Kuhn 2006) and defined as 'concepts, expressions, or other linguistic devices that, when deployed in talk, present explanations for past and/or future activity that guide interactants' interpretation of experience while moulding individual and collective action' (Kuhn 2006, p. 1341).

In the work organization, a multiplicity of discursive resources is likely to be available for identity regulation and identity formation could be the result of the outcome of the array of discourses. For example, in Kuhn's (2006) study of the employees' time



commitments in the work place, the identity regulation is suggested to be the outcome of the multiple discursive resources deployed when individuals talk about their uses of time. The identity regulation could be ineffective or effective,

However, the multiplicity of discursive resources might lead to ineffective identity regulation. Identity regulation would be effective if the managerial discourse is compatible with the salient discursive resource for identification and no alternative discourse is available (Thornborrow and Brown 2009). However, individuals might draw upon discursive resources opposite to the managerial discourse in which case identity regulation will be ineffective.

In view of the current regulation literature, two research gaps could be identified. Firstly, the current literature acknowledges that the identities are regulated through individuals' drawing upon certain discursive resources which are appropriate to the managerially inspired discourse. The compatibility between these discursive resources and the management discourse is crucial for the effective regulation. The discrepancies between the two would result in an outcome of ineffective identity regulation. However, studies rarely consider how the alternative or opposite discursive resources in relation to the management discourse influence identity regulation, and even more rarely attended to is how discursive resources beyond the boundaries of organizations could influence the identity regulation. By this I mean those that have not been mediated and turned more formally into managerial discursive resources. Would these alternatives and opposite discursive resources or those beyond the boundaries of organizations produce an ineffective identity regulation as claimed in the dominant identity literature?

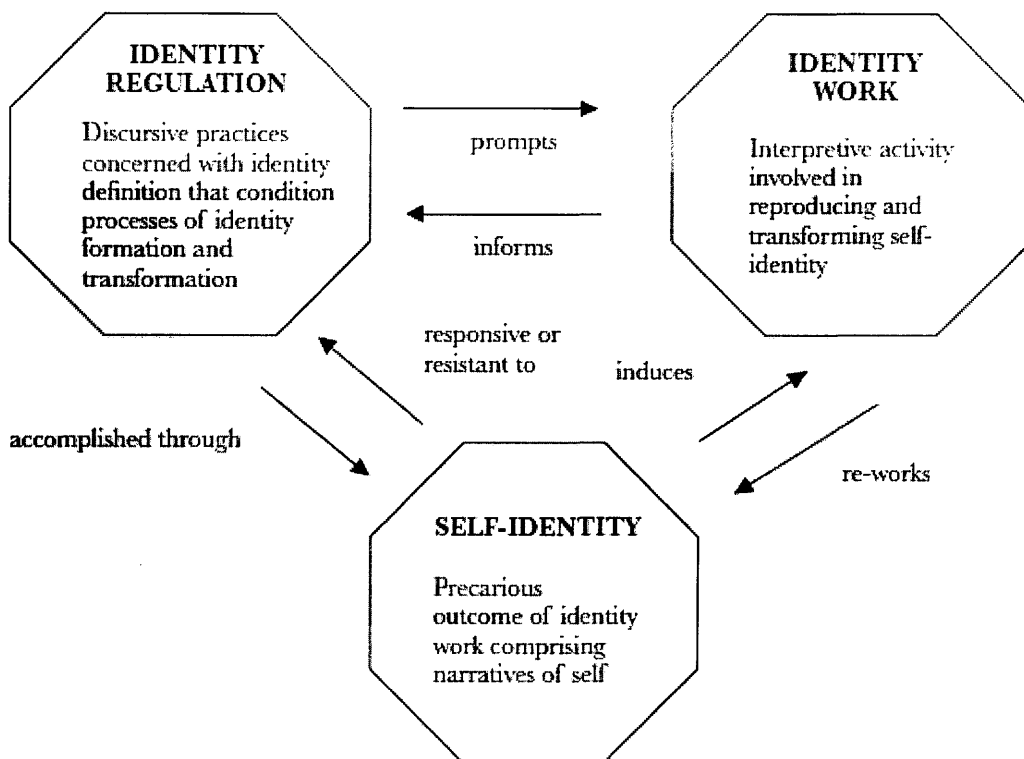
Secondly, literatures to date suggest that multiple discursive resources could influence the identity constructions of the self. Multiple discursive resources could produce both multiple versions and a single version of the self. However, studies seldom pay attention to how a single discursive resource could influence the identity construction. Could it also produce multiple selves or only one version of self?

This study aims to address these two gaps in the literature and advances the current understandings of identity regulation.

#### **2.2.4 Relationships of Identities**

In this section, the focus will be shifted to a scarce area of knowledge in identity research: the relationships among the different constructed identities. Identity research attends to this area as well as to identity work and identity regulation, yet little research is conducted on the relationships between the different constructed identities. This gap in literature has been acknowledged by Carroll and Levy (2008). Though little is done in general on the theorization of the relationships among the different constructed self-identities, some theorization is done between self-identities and others aspects of identity research. The work of Alvesson and Willmott (2002) is an attempt to theorize the relationships of self-identities and two other aspects of identity research: identity work and identity regulation.

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) conceptualize the relationships among self-identity, identity work and identity regulation through the following model:



**Figure 2: Identity regulation, identity work and self identity (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 627)**

The above model ‘indicates how self-identity, as a repertoire of structured narrations, is sustained through identity work in which regulation is accomplished’ (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 627). There seem to be a mutually constitutive relationship among the three.

Theorization of the relationships among identities is also implied in the identity work literature. As reviewed above, identity work is featured by three themes: coherent identities, fragmented identities and contradictory identities. These three themes imply three possible relationships among identities: coherent identities imply a similar relationship; fragmented identities imply a dissimilar relationship; and contradictory

identities imply an opposite relationship among the many different identities constructed by the individuals.

This gap in literature calls for further research. Carroll and Levy's (2008) study is a pioneering attempt to answer this call. Their work contributes to the identity work literature by going beyond the current literature of focusing on 'the relationships among self, identities and organization' and looking at the inter-relationships among the different identities (Carroll and Levy 2008, p. 94). In their paper, they identify two different identities: management identity and leadership identity. It is found that each of the two identities 'is shaped by the other in subtle and overt ways' (Carroll and Levy 2008, p. 75). A uni-directional constitutive relationship of leadership identity on management identity is shown, i.e. the leadership identity needs to be understood through the management identity, but not necessarily the other way round. However, the limitation of their work is that the theorization of the relationship between the two identities largely mirrors the relationships between the two theoretical constructs of management and leaderships. Still little is known about the relationships among the many different identities, without mirroring any external constructs.

Likewise, Esser & Benschop (2009) studied the relationships of multiple identities. Specifically, they studied the relationship between the self-identity (work identity) and other multiple social categories of identities (gender, ethnic and religious identities) within an entrepreneurial context. The study is located in a context of intersectionality of identities: it looks at how Muslim business women in the Netherlands construct their different identities. It is argued that 'the intersectionality of these identity categories requires female entrepreneurs of Moroccan and Turkish origin to do identity work in order to sustain their entrepreneurial identities' (Essers and Benschop

2009, p. 405). Their study also demonstrated that self and social categories of identities in organizations are ‘situationally, dialogically and dynamically constructed’ (Essers and Benschop 2009, p. 418) and it is also a process of co-construction among the multiple identities. The negotiation of the three social categories of identities shapes the work identity of the Muslim business women.

A review of the literature indicates that little research has been done on the dynamics and interactions among the different identities. The above two mentioned papers have their research limitations. Carroll and Levy’s theorizations are grounded upon and reflect largely on the relationship of management and leadership. Esser and Benschop’s (2009) study focuses more on the relationships of the three social categories of identities and how these interactions influence the self-identity formation of the individuals, while still little attention is being paid to the interplay of self-identities. This study tries to address this gap through examining the relationships, the interactions and the dynamics within the different identities constructed by the sales managers in different contexts.

### **2.3 Multilingual Language-based Research in Identity Studies**

With the recent linguistic turn in management and organization studies, language-based studies have been given great recognition and credibility in the mainstream management literature, for example in identity research. With a focus on the language, identity research is predominantly committed to the English language for language-based academic research. This leaves a gap in the discussion on the multilingual language-based research in identity research, which will add value to the current language-based identity research dominated by the English language.

In calling for attention to the other language-based identity, an important yet under-discussed aspect is the translation issues involved in such research where findings are to be produced in English. The importance of translation on research has been acknowledged. However, there are still strong criticisms of the researcher's failure to cognize the role of translation and its subsequent impact on the research findings (Larkin et al., 2007, Temple and Young 2004). Of particular importance, the issues of translation are discussed with relation to: translation, and research findings (ou cited in Temple and Young 2004); its methodological significance in cross-cultural research (Wong and Poon 2010); and multilingual translation issues (Larkin et al., 2007).

There is an assumption that a conceptual equivalence across languages exists. However, this view is criticised and an inherent non-transferability across languages is argued. On the semantic meaning level, current translation practice pays great attention to the equivalence of word meanings between two languages. This is highly problematic, however, since it makes 'global assumptions that research is language free and that the same meaning in the source language can be found in all target languages' (Larkin et al., 2007, p. 469). Therefore, translation should acknowledge the capacity of each language to create its own meaning in the naturalistic setting (Larkin et al., 2007).

At the same time, the translation process is often viewed as a technical, objective process to ensure a 'correct' version of the text. Researchers holding this view are interested in the 'correct' interpretation of the data and generally 'discuss validity in terms of "correct" interpretations, register, ethics, matching of social characteristic and neutral stances' (Temple and Young 2004, p. 163). Analysis is to examine the findings in the translated text, without paying attention to the language issues. Results or findings are often presented as if the language of the data is totally irrelevant

(Temple and Young 2004). These practices potentially present a threat to the research findings.

The role of the translator in the translation process is debated as well. The problem of who does the translation, and whether the researcher also plays the role of translator are of crucial importance to the translation process. The researcher and translator role gives the researcher significant opportunities for 'close attention to cross cultural meanings and interpretation and potentially brings the researcher up close to the problems of meanings equivalence within the research process' (Temple and Young 2004, p. 168).

In the identity literature today, there is the same problem with the language issues on translation: the over dominance of the English language in the language-based identity research and the lack of the debate of the methodological issues involved around language issues. This study collects data from another language and the researcher also assumes the role of translator to translate the Chinese text into English text to further advance the understanding in this area of knowledge. Translation methods employed aim, however, to make the Chinese based meaning, which may not be perfectly rendered in English, available to the reader.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter review the current identity literature: firstly it presents the social constructionist view on the identity; secondly it explores the literature on the coherent, fragmented and contradictory identities; thirdly it discusses the literature on the discursive resources that people are drawn upon for identity regulations, and finally it considers the multilingual translation issues involved in language-based research. Four

gaps are therefore identified: a) little research has been conducted to explore the contradictory identity construction of the individuals in organizations; b) studies rarely attend to how identities are regulated by discursive resources external to the organizations and; c) how multiple identities are regulated by the same singular discursive resources and; d) there is a lack of multilingual research in identity research in general and in translation issues on tackling the language issues in particular.



## Chapter 3 Literature Review: Guanxi

This study explores the identity constructions of organizational members engaged in Chinese inter-organizational relationships. The inter-organizational relationship is operated on a personal level relationship: Guanxi, and it will be important to understand the context-bound identity constructions. This chapter therefore aims to review the literature on Guanxi to locate the contexts that this study is conducted within.

Research on Guanxi is fruitful and has been studied in many different disciplines and fields. In the marketing research literature, the importance of Guanxi has been recognized (Arias and Gomez 1998, Wang 2007b); and the following issues have been looked at conceptually and empirically in the marketing field: the discussion of the internal underlying mechanisms of Guanxi through Chinese relational constructs, for example, renqing (Yang and Wang 2011), ganqing (Shi et al., 2011), xinyong (Leung et al., 2005), gifting practice (Qian, et al., 2007); the discussion of the internal mechanism of Guanxi through western-theory-based relational constructs, for example trust (Liu et al., 2008) and commitment (Chen et al., 2011b); discussion of the external effects of Guanxi on other theoretical concepts, for example, firm performance (Chung 2011); and relationship quality (Yen and Barnes 2011, Yen et al., 2011). Although these concepts explored in the marketing literature are important to the understanding of Guanxi, in two other literatures, anthropology studies on Guanxi and Chinese Confucian philosophy, some other concepts are highlighted as fundamental to the understandings of Guanxi as a cultural and social practice. These acknowledged important concepts in the fields of anthropology and philosophy could be imported into Guanxi studies in marketing research.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will firstly look at what has been done in the marketing literature on Guanxi by summarizing the main articles through a table. The nature of the article, different theoretical focuses of the articles and the theoretical origins and concepts these articles draw upon are highlighted. The limitations of Guanxi literature in marketing will also be pointed out: the understanding of it is mainly grounded in a western theoretical framework. Then I will move on to look at the concepts that are viewed as important to Guanxi by drawing upon the anthropology literature on Guanxi and Chinese Confucian philosophy on Chinese relationships. The concepts that will be discussed in details are: the notion of Guanxi, the Confucian concept of person; five hierarchical relationships; familism and conformity in relationships; the concept of Ganqing; the concept of Renqing; the cardinal values for Confucian concept of person; and the Chinese notion of face. By reviewing these two sets of literature, I aim to highlight what is needed to understand Guanxi from a Chinese perspective, especially for this thesis.

### **3.1 Guanxi in Marketing Literature**

In this section, I will review the literature of Guanxi primarily in marketing research to give an understanding of Guanxi research in a more specific field. To do this, firstly, I will present a table summarizing the articles found in marketing research literature mainly through these aspects: the major claims of the papers; the methods they used; the key theoretical origins they draw upon; and the main theoretical constructs that are discussed. Secondly, based on this table of summary, I will problematize the current research through its conceptual and methodological limitations. Through this, I also argue: despite the current interesting research done in this field, the limitations in

these research articles do point towards a better method of analyzing Guanxi phenomena in Chinese business markets. A fuller explanation of Guanxi is therefore provided after this section.

To locate the scholarly articles of Guanxi in the field of marketing research, I use the ABI/INFORM Global database and input Guanxi as an Abstract field and marketing as the Journal Title field. This identifies 23 entries of articles of Guanxi in any marketing journal. I look at all of these articles and some relevant Guanxi-articles which are cited in the references of these 23 articles. Since some of the Guanxi articles are related to consumer marketing, rather than business markets, these articles are excluded. Then the most relevant Guanxi articles are summarized and included in the following table in the Appendix. Although much has been written about Guanxi in other areas of management, the method it adopted here allows a parsimonious review. The review captures aspects of studies of Guanxi found in a marketing field.

As shown through the above table of summary, the current Guanxi research in marketing literature is dominated by three interests: the exploration of underlying mechanisms of Guanxi through its own Chinese theoretical constructs; the exploration of the underlying mechanism of Guanxi through the western relational constructs and the examination of the role of Guanxi in the research of other theoretical concepts.

In the above tables, quite a number of articles are exploring the underlying mechanisms of Guanxi through Chinese relational constructs and Chinese cultural values. Three constructs are regarded as the most distinctive characteristics for guanxi: ganqing, renqing and xinyong (Yang and Wang 2011). These three Chinese relational constructs in Guanxi receive extensive attention and have been discussed in many different papers (Barnes et al., 2011, Chen et al., 2011a, Leung et al., 2005, Nie et

al., 2011, Shi et al., 2011, Shou et al., 2011, Wang 2007a, Yang and Wang 2011, Yen et al., 2011). Apart from these three key constructs, Guanxi has also been analyzed through other Chinese cultural values: face, harmony and hierarchy (Buttery, et al., 1998; Qian, et al., 2007); reciprocity practice (Barnes et al., 2011, Chen et al., 2011b, Nie et al., 2011) and gift-giving practices (Buttery and Leung 1998, Qian et al., 2007) .

A second approach to the exploration of the underlying mechanisms of Guanxi is through the western relational constructs. The Chinese relational constructs in Guanxi are replaced with, or equated to, some western relationship theory-based relational constructs, e.g. trust and commitment, although there are inherent differences and untransferability between these Chinese and western relational constructs. Guanxi has been analyzed through the western relational constructs of: trust (Liu et al., 2008, Nie et al., 2011); commitment (Chen et al., 2011b, Shi et al., 2011); competence (Leung et al., 2005); satisfaction (Chen et al., 2011b); relationship investment (Shi et al., 2011); and risk (Leung et al., 2005, Liu et al., 2008).

The third approach to Guanxi research is not confined to the underlying mechanisms, but treats Guanxi as a totality and analyzes the relationship between Guanxi and other concepts from different theoretical domains. Therefore, Guanxi is analyzed with firm performance (Chung 2011), corporate capability (Chen and Wu 2011, Lee and Dawes 2005); market orientation (Chung 2011), business to business relationships (Gao et al., 2010, Zhuang et al., 2010), relationship outcome (Barnes et al., 2011), management strategy (Chen et al., 2011a), power and conflict in marketing channels (Yen et al., 2011, Zhuang et al., 2010), business negotiation style (Buttery and Leung 1998) and relationship stability and relationship outcome (Barnes et al., 2011, Liu et al., 2008).

The examinations of Guanxi through these three areas are interesting. However, there are methodological and conceptual problems to this Guanxi literature in marketing. Conceptually, the studies of Guanxi in marketing research tend to replicate the findings of current research on two different levels. On the research findings level, the Guanxi research tends to duplicate findings in the existing literature. As mentioned above, current understandings of Guanxi are mainly through three areas: the underlying mechanism of Guanxi from a Chinese perspective; the understanding of Guanxi from a western perspective; and the relationship of Guanxi with other theoretical constructs. The research findings tend to follow the existing research and fall into any one of these categories. This is problematic in that little research has been done to break the boundaries of these categories to look into new areas.

On a theoretical origin level, Guanxi research tends to show a deeper similarity to existing research by drawing upon the same theoretical origins and applying it in the same research context. As shown in the table of summary, the theoretical origins that these studies draw upon are mainly western-based theory. Therefore studies about Guanxi mainly draw upon a western framework and will tend to produce the finding guided by these origins. This could be problematic in that, as pointed out by Ambler and Styles (2000), the application of the western marketing theory to broaden its scope to an international context might result in labelling some culturally specific concepts through western terms and producing the same research results. This conceptual limitation of the current research points Guanxi research into looking at Guanxi from a new theoretical origin for further research: to understand Guanxi through Chinese perspectives and the Chinese theoretical origins, rather than western-based theories.

Methodologically, current studies about Guanxi are mainly taking a quantitative approach. The research findings are objective and hypotheses are confirmed or

rejected through a rather simplistic correlation of some relational constructs in Guanxi, or the relationship between Guanxi and other concepts. This unavoidably gives Guanxi a partial, static, mechanistic and context-free understanding. While Guanxi is a social practice deeply rooted in Chinese culture and social life, the context, the dynamics and the subtlety within its practice would be better revealed through a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach to Guanxi research therefore will bring a situated and contextual understanding of Guanxi, focusing on the dynamics within Guanxi as a socio-cultural practice, rather than an understanding that focuses on the correlations of its constructs.

In view of the Guanxi literature on marketing research, Guanxi needs to be looked at through Chinese perspectives and should take a qualitative approach. In the next section, I will introduce the concepts that are crucial for this study and they mainly derive from anthropology and sociology studies of Guanxi, and the Chinese philosophy of Confucianism.

### **3.2 Guanxi**

Guanxi is usually translated as ‘relationships’ in English. It is a Chinese word phrase consisting of two Chinese characters: *guan* and *xi*. In Chinese, *guan* means ‘a door lock’ or a ‘gateway’ and *xi* means ‘Linkage or a system of links’ (Law, et al. 2000: 753). Drawing from the connotation, inside the door, the individual is an in-group member, outside the door, the individual is an out-group member (Luo and Chen 1997). Therefore, ‘guanxi refers to the connection between two parties through a system of links when one party can choose to ‘lock oneself up’ or ‘open the link’ to the other party’ (Law et al., 2000, p. 753). The party approached is ‘the one with the

power to facilitate access to information and/or resources which would, for the other party, not be accessible at all or only with difficulty' (Parnell 2005, p. 35).

Guanxi is defined differently by different scholars. However there seems to be a consensus among these scholars that Guanxi is a personal relationship based on 'implicit mutual interests and benefits' (Yang 1994, p. 1), 'bonds the exchange parties through reciprocal exchange of favours and mutual obligation' (Lee, et al., 2001; 52), and can 'develop networks of mutual dependence and create a sense of obligation and indebtedness' (Standifird 2006, p. 2).

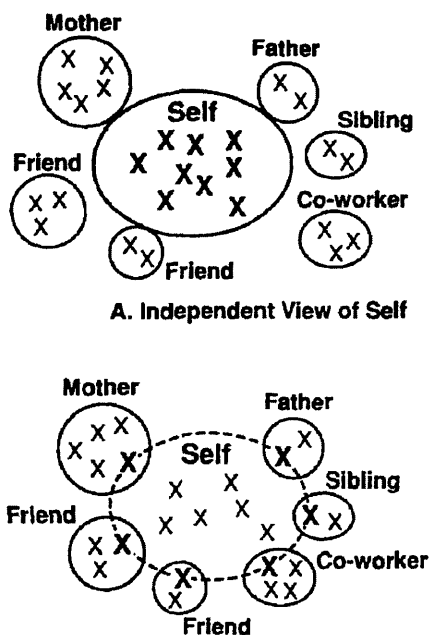
Guanxi is so important in Chinese social life in general and in business practice in particular that it 'has become synonymous with the network of social and business connections necessary to do business' in China (Arias and Gomez 1998, p. 146). Guanxi means 'relationship or relation but its essence is a set of interpersonal connections that facilitate exchanges of favours between people' (Bian 1997, p. 369) and exists directly or indirectly among people (Bian 1994). The most important characteristics of Guanxi, as Bian (1997) noted, are the 'reciprocal obligations' of favours among the parties in the Guanxi. Different Guanxi together form a Guanxi network, operating with its principles of transferability, reciprocity, intangibility and utilitarianism (Park and Luo 2001a). These principles of Guanxi will be discussed in the sections of Ganqing and Renqing, which are two important notions to Guanxi in Chinese culture.

### **3.3 The Confucian Concept of Person**

In order to fully understand Guanxi, it is necessary to understand the Confucian concept of person, since self is closely linked to relationships in Confucian culture.

The concept of *self*, i.e. individual, in Confucian culture is different from that in western culture (Gao 1996). *Self* in the western world signifies an independent entity with free will, emotions and personality (Gao 1996). However, *self* in Confucian culture is an interdependent *self* (Gao 1996). It is “defined by a person’s surrounding relations” and thus “involves multiple layers of relations with others” (Gao 1996, p. 83).

The concept of the self from Markus and Kitayama (1991) could help the understanding of the Confucian concept of self.



**Figure 3: Conceptual representations of the self (Markus and Kitayama, 1991)**

(A: Independent construal. B: Interdependent construal.)

In the above figure, the small circle is the other; the big circle is the self. For the construal of the interdependent self, ‘others are included within the boundaries of the self because relations with others in specific contexts are the defining features of the self’ (Markus and Kitayama 1991, p. 245). For the independent self, ‘others are less



centrally implicated in one's current self-definition or identity' and 'the self is assumed to be a complete, whole, autonomous entity, without the others' ((Markus and Kitayama 1991, p. 246).

The definition of self in Confucian culture incorporates the relationships with others. In the next section, I will explore the relationships which are considered to be fundamental for a Confucian concept of person.

### **3.4 Five Hierarchical Relationships**

In the relationship-oriented Confucian society (Park and Luo 2001a), different behaviours and norms are codified and predetermined for different relationships. In Confucian culture, among the many relationships surrounding a person, five hierarchical dyadic relationships are considered to be the most fundamental relationships for a person. These are between: "King and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elders and youngers, friend and friend' (Yum, 1987). Mutual moral obligations and roles are imposed on and expected to be fulfilled by both parties in these relationships. Different guiding principles are set forth to guide these basic relationships: "*loyalty* between king and subject, *closeness* between father and son, *distinction in duty* between husband and wife, *orders* between elders and youngers, and *faith* between friend and friend" (Yum 1987, p. 75). Obligations are further set for each party in the dyads: "father-love, son-filiality; elder brother-brotherly love, younger brother-reverence; king-justice, subject-loyalty; husband-initiative, wife-obedience; and friends-mutual faith" (Yum 1987, p. 75). These principles and obligations could be summarised in the following table:

<b>Relationship Type</b>	<b>Principles</b>	<b>Duties for Each Party</b>
<b>King --Subject</b>	Loyalty	King: justice
		Subject: loyalty
<b>Father --- Son</b>	Closeness	Father: love
		Son: filiality
<b>Husband – wife</b>	Distinction in duty	Husband: initiative
		Wife: obedience
<b>Elder brother --- younger brother</b>	Order	Elder brother: brotherly love
		Younger brother: reverence
<b>Friend --- friend</b>	Faith	Friend: mutual faith
		Friend: mutual faith

**Table 1: Five hierarchical relationships**

In Confucian culture, these five relationships are considered to be most important for the definition of self. Harmony between the self and all kinds of surrounding relationships is the most important concern.

### **3.4.1 Hierarchical Harmony and Conformity**

How to establish a harmonious human-centred society is the basic theoretical concern of Confucians (King 1985). According to Confucian philosophy, the human society should reflect the nonhuman universe which is “a harmoniously functioning organism consisting of an orderly hierarchy of interrelated parts and forces, which, though unequal in their status, are all equally essential for the total process” (Bodde 1976, p.

46). Therefore, reflecting this harmony means that in an ideal society, “each individual accepts his own social position without complaint and performs to the best of his ability the obligations attached to that position” (Bodde 1953. p. 46). Therefore, in interaction with others, harmony could be practiced in “tolerance of others, harmony with others, and solidarity with others” (Gao 1996, p. 85). In this case, hierarchical harmony between the unequal parties means conformity. Conformity needs to be shown from the people who are in lower positions in the hierarchy to the people in the higher positions of the hierarchy. In this case, conformity needs to be shown from: subject, son, wife, younger brother to respectively: king, father, husband, elder brother. The relationships of younger friend and elder friend sometimes are categorized into the brother-brother categories, in which case, the conformity principle should be applied as well.

### **3.4.2 Familism**

Familism is another very important feature for the relationships in the Confucian society. Family relationship is at the centre of all the relationships and other social relationships are arranged in terms of family relationships. Two other typologies of interpersonal relationships proposed by Hwang (1987) and Yang (1995) could further illustrate this family-orientation in Chinese interpersonal relationships.

Hwang (1987) categorizes the different relationships into three different types on different bases. The first one is the relationship of ‘expressive ties’ which is need-oriented, and exists mainly ‘among family members or close friends’; the second one is ‘instrumental ties’ which is goal-oriented; and the third is ‘mixed ties’ which is ‘equity based’ and involves both expressive and instrumental elements (Hwang 1987,

p. 952-953). For these different relationship ties, different levels of reciprocity are practiced by both parties.

Hwang's (1987) typology could be summarized as follows:

Relationship types	Rules	Reciprocity
<b>Expressive ties:</b> (among family, close friends, and other congenial groups)	Need rule	Low level of reciprocity
<b>Mixed ties:</b> (among neighbours, classmates, colleagues, teachers and students, people sharing a natal area,	<i>Renqing</i> rule	Intermediate level of reciprocity
<b>instrumental ties:</b> (among salesmen and customers, bus drivers and passengers, nurses and outpatients  in a hospital, and so forth)	Equity rule	High level of reciprocity.

**Table 2: Typology of Chinese social relationships**

Hwang's types of relationships are mainly based on the distinction between family and non-family members. Reciprocity is practiced mainly among non-family members. Emotional attachments are mainly among family members and decrease as the relationship move beyond the family circles to mixed ties and instrumental ties.

Similar to Hwang's typology, Yang (1995) also draws on traditional Chinese concepts and makes similar distinctions between different relationship categories.

Distinctions of the two groups	Relationship	Methods of social treatment	Pattern of interdependence
<i>Zi ji ren</i> (one's own kith and kin)	<i>Jia ren</i> : family members <i>Jia</i> : <u>home</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>people, human</u>	<i>Ze ren</i> : responsibility <i>Ze</i> : <u>responsibility</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>responsibility</u>	Unconditional interdependence  (high particularism)
<i>Zi</i> : <u>self</u> <i>Ji</i> : <u>self</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>human</u>	<i>Shou ren</i> : familiar people <i>Shou</i> : <u>familiar/cooked</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>human</u>	<i>Renqing</i> : interpersonal favour <i>Ren</i> : <u>human</u> <i>Qing</i> : <u>affect, sentiment</u>  <i>emotion</i>	Special accommodation  (moderate particularism)
<i>Wai ren</i> : outsider <i>Wai</i> : <u>outside</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>human</u>	<i>Sheng ren</i> : strangers <i>Sheng</i> : <u>stranger/raw</u> <i>Ren</i> : <u>human</u>	<i>Li hai</i> :  Gain and loss <i>Li</i> : <u>benefit</u> <i>Hai</i> : <u>harm</u>	Discretionary treatment  (no particularism)

Table 3: Distinctive principles of interactions in the three categories of relationships (Yang, 1995)

In the above table, the meanings of the Chinese words are provided in italics and underscored. As shown above, the principles for interaction for each type are very different depending on their types, with the family relationship being responsibility, the familiar relationship being *renqing* and reciprocity, the stranger relationship being personal gains and losses.

Yang's (1995) typology closely adheres to the Chinese family values and clearly makes the distinction between kinship and non kinship relationship. Therefore, for him, the first most important relationship is kinship-based family relationship; the second most important one is familiar relationship with non-kinship people: friends, colleagues, classmates and neighbours as a familiar relationship; and the third relationship is with strangers. The first two types are further termed by Yang as the insiders and the third one as the outsiders. Similar to Yang, Luo (1997) also classified the relationship bases into three categories of circles: with family members in the inner concentric circle, acquaintances at the outer circles, and friends in between.

In all the categorizations of relationship, family being the most important type of relationship, the non-family members are distinguished according to the in-group and out-group distinctions (Chow and Ng 2004). The in-group members would be treated like family members and emotional in nature, while relationships with the out-group members would be instrumental in nature (Chow and Ng 2004). Both Hwang and Yang argued that relationship is a social resource for the individual and the different relationship type in which the individual is involved is in line with the way he is being treated. Therefore, moving from the stranger relationship to the familiar relationship; from the instrumental ties to the expressive tie relationship would be crucial in the individual's daily practices of Guanxi with others.

However, all these relationships are both predetermined and voluntary (Park and Luo 2001a). In the predetermined aspect of relationships, individuals are playing a receptive role and responsibilities are prescribed upon the individuals based on the degree of closeness. In the voluntary aspect of relationships, the 'individual plays an active role in determining the character and tone of each exchange in an external network beyond the predetermined relationship' (Park and Luo 2001a). Each

individual is involved in these complicated dual roles in relationships (Park and Luo 2001b). The manoeuvre from the voluntary relationship to the predetermined relationship type changes the obligations and leads to an exchange of favours between the individuals involved in the relationship.

### **3.5 ‘*Ganqing*’ (affect/sentiment):**

*Ganqing*, literally translated as affect or sentiment, consists of two Chinese characters: *gan* and *qing*. *Gan* means: to feel. *Qing* means: affect, sentiment, emotions. It is defined as the indicator of the ‘quality of relationship’ between two parties that varies ‘in warmth and intensity’ (Fried 1953, p. 103). *Ganqing* reflects the closeness of Guanxi (Hwang 1987).

Guanxi consists of both instrumentality and an affective component – *ganqing* (Gold et al., 2002). Good *ganqing* generates close Guanxi, and the absence of *ganqing* generates distant Guanxi (Jacobs 1979). Though *ganqing* is an affective component of human feelings involved in Guanxi, Jacob (1979) argues that *ganqing* is both instrumental and emotional in nature, just like Guanxi. Kipnis (2002) also points out that the feelings do not necessarily have to be accurate representations of the inner feelings and *ganqing* is used as a tool to constitute the subjectivities of individuals and cultivate good Guanxi. In line with this view, Fried (1953) also argues *ganqing* ‘presumes a much more specific common interest, much less warmth and more formality of contact, and includes a recognized degree of exploitation’ between the two parties (Fried 1953, p. 226). It needs to be differentiated from friendship, since *ganqing* implies an exploitation which friendship doesn’t (Fried 1953).

The cultivation of *ganqing* also reflects its duality of instrumental and emotional nature. *Ganqing* could be cultivated in two dynamic processes: ‘social interaction’ between individuals; and ‘utilization and helping’ each other in a mutually beneficial way (Jacobs 1979, Yan 1996). During these processes, the depth of *ganqing* could be instrumentally represented and materialized in various ways, like ‘giving gifts, banqueting, ritual, etiquette, and even the use of various forms of address’ (Kipnis 2002, p. 27). In a way, *ganqing* is cultivated through the practice of *renqing*, which is often translated as favour.

Since *ganqing* is an indicator of the quality of Guanxi and its depth could be materially represented through *renqing*, in the next section, the concept of *renqing* which is crucial for the practice of Guanxi, will be discussed.

### **3.6 ‘*Renqing*’ (favour) and Reciprocity**

*Renqing*, often translated as favour, consists of two Chinese characters: *ren* and *qing*. *Ren* means: human and *qing* means: affect, sentiment and emotion. It is regarded as a lubricant for harmonious Guanxi (Guo 2001) and defined as ‘a resource that an individual can present to another person as a gift in the course of social exchange in his interpersonal network’ (Hwang 1987, p. 954). Therefore, money, favours, goods, or services could all be used to generate *renqing* (Hwang 1987), and all of these could be regarded as cash or non-cash gifts (Wilson 1997).

*Renqing* is regulated by the social norm of courtesy (Guo 2001) and is closely bound up with the idea of reciprocity (Yang 1957, Yau 1988), which means individuals in the same social network of Guanxi are obligated to give gifts. Failure to reciprocate would be regarded as a denial of the Guanxi between each other and would result in



isolation from the network (Yan 1996). Therefore, *renqing* needs to be done throughout the process of social interaction in order to maintain Guanxi.

*Renqing* is closely related to the *ganqing* as well, though it is less affectionate, more instrumental and reciprocity-driven. *Ganqing* could be materialized through the gifting practice in *renqing*. As Kipnis (Kipnis 1996) remarked, the material obligation of *renqing* and the sentiment of *ganqing* should be congruent in Guanxi. ‘Generally speaking, the closer the Guanxi, the bigger the gift’ (Kipnis 1996, p. 301). Besides the values of the gifts, timing of gifting practices is important, and gift-giving should be customary and ritualized (Yan 1996). Giving a gift at an inappropriate time would create a feeling of insult to the receiver because it would appear to be too instrumental (Yan 1996).

Since the levels of *renqing* mirrors the level of *ganqing*, the *renqing* practices would imply the level of *ganqing* involved which the recipients of *renqing* might held true (Kipnis 1996). Once it is held as true, *ganqing* would be cultivated and friendship comes. After friendship is established, request for help would be very difficult for the gift-recipient to decline due to *ganqing* in their Guanxi (Yang 1994).

In the business context, individuals need not only to maintain the existing Guanxi, but also needs to expand their Guanxi. Since friendship plays a central role in interpersonal relationship (Guo 2001), cultivating friendship is used as a way to expand Guanxi (Yan 1996). Given the nature that friendship has through *ganqing* (Guo 2001), taking multiple strategies to seize every customary opportunity to do *renqing* would be helpful for the cultivation of *ganqing*.

### 3.7 Confucian Concept of Heart and Mind:

*Xin*, literally translated as ‘heart’ in English, covers both the physical ‘heart’ and the evaluating ‘mind’ in the western sense (Sun 1991). It primarily refers to ‘the seat of mental acts like evaluating and cognition’, but also to: ‘the location of the desires’; ‘ideas’, ‘intentions’, ‘feelings’ and ‘tendencies’ or potential behaviour (Munro 1969, p.74). *Xin* is viewed as a ‘unitary concept of body and mind as well as the emotive nature of Chinese reasoning’ (Sun 1991, p.3, ). It is the mind which governs the body and wisdom (Munro 1969).

*Xin* is important for the definition of the Confucian self and social relationships. The Confucian concept of self is defined through the relationship to the others, especially in the five hierarchical relationships. In Chinese language, the self is literally referred to as ‘body’. The definition of the self (body) is made possible through a relationship between one body and the bodies (Sun 1991). This relational interconnection is captured through connections of the hearts of the two bodies as well, since the ‘individual as a body is to be made whole by the exchange of ‘hearts’ (*xin*) between two such bodies’ (Guo 2001, Sun 1991, p. 2). The exchange of the hearts consists of ‘an exchange of human feelings between two such bodies’ (Sun 1991, p.2).

*Xin* involves an emotive reasoning and is associated with morality as well. Meeting the moral demands would be through reciprocating the good feelings of the other part, which is viewed as having a *xin* (heart): emotive reasoning, even though it sometimes means ‘compromising one’s rational self-interest and one’s principle’ (Sun 1991). Failing to reciprocate would be viewed as having no *xin* (heart).

The *xin* (heart and mind) is very important to the Chinese social conduct and norm, and indicates emotionality and morality at the same time. In the next section, related

to the five hierarchical relationships, the Confucian cardinal virtues which are the guiding ethics for social interaction will be discussed.

### **3.8 Cardinal Virtues: *Ren* (humanheartedness, benevolence), *Li* (propriety) and *Yi* (reverence, righteousness, respect, justice)**

Confucianism sets out the cardinal virtues for the Confucian concept of person in social interaction with others. The Confucian cardinal virtues of *ren*, *li*, and *yi* will be discussed in detail.

#### **3.8.1 *Ren* (humanheartedness, benevolence)**

*Ren*, which is often translated as human heartedness, benevolence, is considered to be the complete virtue (Fan 2003) and the most fundamental moral principle in Chinese social life (Munro 1969). *Ren*, very often has the meaning of love, which ‘manifests itself in humane treatment of others’ (Munro 1969, p. 29). Therefore, a human is a ‘creature who loves his kin and can extend the sentiment and humane treatment to all people’ (Munro 1969, p. 29).

However, for Confucians, this love from *ren* is a ‘graduated love, rather than universal love’; is ‘love with distinction’ and is in accordance with the ‘nature of one’s relation to them’ (Wang 2003, p.127). *Ren* has its natural basis; this unequal application of love to different people in the society represents the unequal importance of parts in the universe. To unite the things in the universe to achieve harmony is the principle of *ren* in human society for social harmony, which ‘directs the naturally unequal humans to live harmoniously among one another’ (Fan 2003, p. 151).

Therefore, this love distinction towards others is ‘with differentiation and relativity of importance’ (Fan 2003, p.150). Governed by the principles of graduated love, one should devote the most love to one’s family members and then extend and diminish the love from the mostly close central family members to the most distant strangers in the five hierarchical relationships (Fan 2003). Therefore, loving strangers as much as loving ones’ family member is considered to be totally wrong (Fan 2003). Giving preferential treatment to the family members and friends is considered to be right (Fan 2003).

Distinctions of love could be displayed through the different emotional sub-principles used in the five hierarchical relationships: affection (between father and son); righteousness (between king and subject; function (between husband and wife); order (between older and younger); fidelity (between friend and friend) (Fan 2003).

Therefore, treating everyone unequally, harmony would be achieved. This is related to the concept of *Yi* (righteousness).

### **3.8.2 *Yi* (righteousness, justice)**

*Yi*, often translated in English as righteousness, is an important ethic for the Confucian concept of man. *Yi* ‘means appropriateness; respecting superiors is its most important rule’ (Hwang 1999, p. 166) and respect needs to be paid to those who require respect by the relationships. *Yi* is often translated into justice. It is often used with two other Chinese characters: *ren* and *qing*. *Renyi* means: benevolent justice or benevolent righteousness; while *qingyi* means: affective justice or affective righteousness (Hwang 1999).

From the perspective of Confucian ethics of *yi*, in social interaction with others, only through observing the principle of respecting the superior and favouring the intimate; is justice or righteousness achieved by the person (Hwang 1999). This view of justice is based on two important criteria: superiority/inferiority and intimacy/distance, instead of reason on which the western justice is based.

This view of justice therefore complies with the principles held in the ethics of *Ren* as mentioned above.

### **3.8.3 *Li*: (propriety)**

*Li*, is usually translated as ‘propriety’ ‘rituals’ ‘ceremony’ or ‘rules’ (Munro 1969, p.26). It means ‘rituals, properties, and ceremonial expressions of ethical ideals such as filial loyalty and obedience’ (Yan 1996, p.44). *Li* covers a wide range of standardized customs, especially those related to interpersonal relationship, for example children show filial piety to the father (Munro 1969).

*Li* is recognized as a means for social control and regulation. Different from the control of law upon persons which ‘inhibits action momentarily’, the control through *li* upon human behaviour is ‘internalized and made permanent’ (Munro 1969, p. 79). When *li* is observed, a direct relationship is assumed ‘between the overt behaviour and the covert sentiment’ (Munro 1969, p. 79). When ‘the regulation of the sentiment by *li* (rites) is made habitual by training, then the sentiments always emerge as the right behavioural forms naturally and effortlessly’ (Munro 1969, p. 155).

*Li* relates to the social harmony, in this sense harmony lies in the practice of the rituals on the right occasion by the right person (Wang 2003). This is the most important assumption of the Confucian concept of *li*: ‘when ritual propriety is observed, people

are brought into cooperative action that respects the place, needs and merits of each' (Neville 2003, p. 192).

Apart from the ceremonial sense and ritual sense of *li*, *li* could be used in the sense of personal gift and it 'usually involved a tangible benefit for people in general, and in this sense' (Munro 1969, p. 93). The term gift in Chinese: *liwu* is composed of two characters: *li* and *wu*. The first is *li*, which, as explained above, is rituals and ceremonial expressions, while *wu* means material things. The Chinese terms indicate that 'a gift is more than a material present – it carries cultural rules (properties) and also involves rituals, so, 'a *wu* without *li* is just a thing, not a gift' (Yan 1996, p. 44). Therefore, gift: *liwu* is often referred to just by simply using *li*, 'emphasizing the cultural codes rather than the material aspects of the gift' (Yan 1996, p. 44) and 'the material content of the gift cannot be separated from its cultural meaning and ritual context'(Yan 1996, p. 45). Therefore, the exchange of the gift is not only based on the economic principles of the material things exchanged (Yan 1996).

Gifting could be expressive and instrumental in nature. Instrumental gifts function as a tool to change the current patterns of previously existing social relationships and they are featured as initial and active gifts, while expressive gifts are customary and follow the rituals and cultural codes, aiming at maintaining the social relations (Yan 1996).

### **3.9 Face**

Another notion which is important for the Guanxi is the concept of face in Chinese culture. Face has been recognized as 'an important mechanism through which both obligation and reciprocity operates' (Yang 1995, p. 140). In the west, face is conceptualized 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' (Erving 1955, p. 213).

Face is represented through two different words in Chinese: *mianzi* and *lian*. Both of them mean 'face' in English, but they have different connotations. *Lian* refers to 'the confidence of society in the moral character of ego' (Hu 1944, p. 61) and is 'the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfil his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being' (Hu 1944, p. 45). *Lian* is more related to the morality of the self. The loss of *lian* is a social sanction of one's violation of moral standards (Hu 1944).

In contrast, *mianzi* 'stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation' (Hu 1944, p. 45). It is 'prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever manoeuvring' and 'dependent at all times on his external environment' (Hu 1944, p. 45). A man with high social status is considered as having *mianzi*, those who are from a humble status are viewed as having no *mianzi*, but both of them could have *lian* at the same time. *Mianzi* could be gained. When *mianzi* is given by others, one's prestige is increased by others in front of the rest of the people (Hu 1944). *Mianzi* could also be lost. The loss of *mianzi* is not only from one's failure to observe the requirement to maintain one's *mianzi*, but also by how he is treated by others, i.e. others' failure to pay him a due regard for his *mianzi* (Ho 1976)

### **3.10 Summary:**

In the identity literature review chapter, I have mainly reviewed the literature related to a few important concepts for this study: identity, discourse and discursive resource. These few concepts are closely linked to each other. The concept of identity is defined from a social constructionist perspective, seeing identity as multiple and a dynamic construction of the individual that summarises 'who he/she is'. Discourse plays an important role in the process of identity construction. The concept of discourse draws upon the idea that language can do things and performs certain social actions. Discourse is therefore considered as: language use as a form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). The concept of discursive resource also links to social practice and is seen to influence social actions as well. Identity relates to discourse and discursive resource in that identity is constructed through social practices by drawing upon different discursive resources.

Identity is also relational, that is, always constructed in different relationships with others. This study locates the identity constructions of sales managers in a Chinese relationship milieu: Guanxi. Having highlighted the close link of identity, discourse and discursive resource, the identity construction as relational in the social practice of Guanxi not only draws attention to the importance of discourse, but more specifically the importance of language and meaning in Guanxi studies.

Current Guanxi literature mainly studies Guanxi through western theoretical constructs and neglects Chinese theoretical constructs. It is therefore argued that studying Guanxi in Chinese terms and from the Chinese perspective is important. The importance of Chinese language and Chinese meaning needs to be considered in studying Guanxi as well. Compared with the western representational languages, the



meaning of the Chinese language is conveyed in a more metaphorical manner, rather than in a literal manner. To express a particular intended meaning, English language might just need one English word, and the Chinese language might need a few characters. The meaning of the character combination might be different from the combined meanings of the individual characters in Chinese languages. While each Chinese character has its own meanings, the meaning of the character combination is conveyed through two levels.

The first level is a surface level meaning, or the intended meaning. This meaning is mainly for the character combination. The surface level meaning could be either metaphorical or literal. The metaphorical aspect of the combination links the combination to the characters that are articulated together, making an obvious metaphorical meaning which could be understood by everyone. It has a linguistic effect to explain the meaning of the sentence that the combination is used.

The second level is a deep level meaning. This level of meaning could be literal and metaphorical as well. This level of meaning places emphasis on the meanings of the individual characters in the combination. It further enriches and extends the surface meanings of the combination by involving the meanings of all the individual characters in the combination. Therefore, if the meanings of the individual words are metaphorical, their metaphorical aspects links with each other within the combination to express the surface level meaning. It has a linguistic effect to explain and communicate the surface meaning of the combination.

These two levels of meanings contribute together to the meaning-making of Chinese languages. However, most of the time, the translation remains at the surface level to serve for the effective communication of the sentence. The metaphors at the level of

individual characters are neglected. The translation of the surface meaning and certain loss of the deep meaning lose the more sophisticated aspects contained in the original, Chinese formulation. A more sophisticated translation that retains and interprets the metaphorical emphasis of the Chinese language at the surface level dealing with the meaning of combination of characters and at deep level dealing with the meaning of the individual character, is necessary. It is therefore a necessary step towards producing an understanding of Guanxi through Chinese theoretical constructs in order to present this to a western audience.

In the next section, I will continue to discuss the methodology that guides this piece of research.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

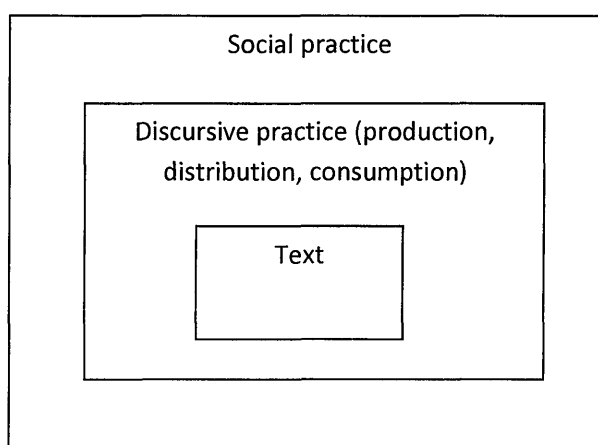
Picking upon a social constructionist view on identity research and the notion of discourse as discussed in chapter 2, this chapter discusses the methodologies which are in line with these ideas and used in this study.

This chapter mainly discusses three approaches to explore the discursive identity constructions of organizational members: Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), narrative analysis and metaphor analysis. Firstly, I will introduce CDA, including its key theoretical assumptions and its applications in organizational settings. Then I will move on to introduce narrative analysis and a deconstructive strategy used in the narrative analysis. Boje's definition of narratives and ante-narratives will be discussed. A deconstructive strategy produced by Boje for analyzing narratives and ante-narratives: 'duality search', will be presented later. Finally, I will look at metaphor analysis and discuss two different approaches within metaphor analysis: cognitive linguistic and discursive approaches towards metaphors in current organization studies. The theoretical assumptions of these two approaches will be compared and contrasted to highlight the discursive approach of metaphor analysis used in this study. These three approaches are not separate from each other: metaphor analysis attends to the discursive identities through metaphors-in-use in the text; narratives analysis attends to the immediate context where the metaphors emerged; CDA attends to the greater socio-cultural context that the metaphoric identities employed; and metaphor analysis and narrative analysis are incorporated within the greater framework of CDA.

## 4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Like other approaches to discourse analysis, CDA analyzes real language use, but it differs from others in that it aims for interdisciplinary research and brings together linguistic analysis with social theories to investigate social problems (Wodak 2001). CDA holds some important theoretical principles, which makes it fit for the research purposes of this thesis: discourse, the power relations which are manifested in discourse and the context of texts.

The underpinning theoretical assumption of CDA is to regard ‘discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of social practice’ (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p. 258). The following three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough (1992) captures the relationship between discourse and social practice. In this three-dimensional model, language use is an instance of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice (Grant et al., 2004a).



**Table 4 Three-dimensional model of CDA (Fairclough 1992, p. 73)**

As a social practice, drawing on Bakhtin (1981), a dialectical relationship is assumed between discourse and social practice, to be more specific, between ‘particular

discursive practices and the specific field of action (including situations, institutional frames and social structures), in which they are embedded' (Wodak and Reisigl 2001, p. 383). Therefore, discourse is both socially constitutive and socially constituted. Discourse constitutes three domains of social life: social relationships between people, social identities of people and representation of the world (Fairclough and Wodak 1997), and is constituted by them as well. This view is in line with Halliday's (1978) systemic linguistic theory which regards language as a socially functional semantic system and serves three different meta-functions: ideational function in representing the world; interpersonal function in constructing social relations and identities; and textual function in constructing systems of knowledge and meaning. The dialectical relationship between discourse and Guanxi as a social practice could be analyzed through the language use. Also, by analyzing language use, how Guanxi practice socially shapes the language use and is shaped by it, and how social identities and relationships in Guanxi practice are socially constructed by language use could be unveiled.

Power relations are another major concern in CDA. CDA recognizes the relationships between language and power. Language use is regarded as a power effect and it 'indexes power, expresses power' (Wodak 2001, p. 11). Power relations produce domination of power groups and marginalization of powerless groups, and thereby produce differences in social structures (Wodak 2001). Power is therefore crucial in the analysis of language use in CDA. Two major aspects of the power/language relationships receive most attention: 'power in discourse' and 'power behind discourse' (Fairclough 1989, p. 43) Power in discourse is 'concerned with discourse as a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted' (Fairclough 1989, p. 43) and 'powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of non-

powerful participants' (Fairclough 2001, p. 38-39). Three types of constraints could be exercised in the site of discourse: contents of discourse, the relations of the participants and the subject positions participant's take (Fairclough 1989).

This thesis studies the discursive identity construction of sales managers when they are engaged in Guanxi building with their customers. In the Guanxi building process, the unequal power relations between the sales manager and the customer are also discursively and contextually represented. When sales managers are indeed interacting with their customers or talking as if they are with the customers, the customers are projected as more powerful and the sales managers as less powerful. Customers exercise power in discourse through controlling the content of the talk and the contribution to the talk.

However, when sales managers are with the researchers and talking about themselves with the customers but to the researcher, the sales managers are projected as more powerful and the customers as less powerful. The unequal power relations are projected differently depending on the context of the talk by the sales managers.

Power could also be exercised behind discourse. This power is to do with the structures of order of discourse, a notion from Foucault (1981). Seeing the order of discourse as hidden effect of power, power behind discourse in CDA is concerned with 'how orders of discourse, as dimensions of the social orders of social institutions or societies, are themselves shaped and constituted by relations of power' (Fairclough 2001, p. 36). Viewing discourse is conditioned and determined by social structures, the actual discourse is therefore determined by a set of, or a network of, underlying conventions of discourse, which is known as order of discourse in CDA (Fairclough 1989). The order of discourse is closely linked to conventions of discourse types.

Certain discourse types impose certain implicit conventions upon the discourse participants in a certain situation. Discourse as a social practice is not only constrained by certain discourse conventions for certain practice, but also by the network of conventions in the order of discourse (Fairclough 1989). In this thesis, organizational members are engaged in different discourse types at the same time. Sales managers embrace different discourse conventions and construct different discursive identities in the two main discourse types: conversation with the customers and conversation with the researcher. Within these two main discourse types, there are sub-types which assume different conventions.

Another important aspect of power relationship is ‘power behind discourse’, and it is mainly concerned with ‘who has access to which discourses’, and ‘who has the power to impose and enforce constraints on access’ (Fairclough 1989, p. 62). The networks of discourse types drawn upon by participants in certain situations are determined by the powerful participants. In this way, the powerless participants are being positioned in certain subject positions. Certain conventions of discourse types are exercised upon the powerless group and constrains the ways that things are being handled. In the case of this thesis, sales managers engage with their customers firstly through an introduction of themselves and the company, followed by the friendship-oriented communications, then followed by the discussion of the business deals. These discourse types set constraints on the discursive access of discourse participants: what is discursively available to them in this given situation. For example, sales managers and their customers in business meetings and dinners would have different language use. The different discourse types in these two settings make sales managers and their customers take different subject positions and have different contents of talk. In this thesis, controlled by the discourse types and the order of discourse, the discursive

resources the sales managers draw upon are different. These conventions control the discourse resource that is made available to the members in that specific context. The different conventions in different discourse types influence the exercise of power as well, making all of the people subjects.

CDA also views discourse as ideological, reflecting the dominant ideology of the powerful group. How texts are produced, distributed and consumed in a particular way by different organizational actors; how a certain way of representation of the world dominates, is regarded as an effect of ideology which helps to maintain domination of the people in power (Fairclough 1989). Viewing discourse as ideological therefore holds an assumption that language use represents the world in a particular way and 'constitutes particular way of being' (Fairclough 2003, p. 26). Ideology is hidden in discourse and naturalized into common sense discursive practices (Fairclough 1989). The naturalisation of ideology could be found in the commonsensical daily life 'interactional routines' for certain discourse types: 'the conventional ways in which participants interact with each other'(Fairclough 1989, p. 98). The different interactional routines are abided by and taken for granted by the discourse participants. The unequal power relations between the different social groups are maintained in this common sense practice (Wodak 2001, Wodak and Reisigl 2001).

CDA also regards discourse as historical and takes the context of text into consideration. Discourse is produced within a context and it acquires its meaning in a specific situation (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). The broader socio-cultural and historical contexts need to be taken into consideration in order to understand the discourse, demystify the power relations which control the discourse in a particular way. As mentioned above, discourse is in a dialectical relationship with social practice. Discourse constitutes and is constituted by the social practice. At the text level, the



dialectical relationship is captured by the concept of intertextuality in CDA, which views that: text is defined horizontally (co-defined by the articulator and the audience) and vertically (co-defined by the prior and later texts in the same chain of text utterances) (Kristeva 1986). In view of the situatedness of the discourse, the broader Chinese social and cultural context will also be considered. Specifically, the Confucian cultural values and principles for the inter-personal relationships where the inter-organizational relationship is embedded within will be considered. At the textual level, the immediate contexts will also be taken into consideration.

In the organizational setting, CDA aims to look at ‘the relationship between organizational talk and the exercise of power and resistance’ (Mumby and Clair 1997, p. 183), how ideology maintains the power relations through discourse; how power is exercised naturally as taken-for-granted by the people in power (Mumby and Clair 1997). CDA has been used quite widely in organization and management research. Philips et al. (2008) explore the practical implications by applying CDA to strategic management research. Applying CDA in strategy research, Vaara et al. (2004) examine the discursive elements in strategy talk to contribute to the understandings of the myriad of microprocesses and practices that make up strategies. Empirically, Vaara and Tienari (2002) draw upon CDA to analyse the discursive construction of mergers and acquisitions in the media. CDA is also used in identity research as well. Hackley (2000) uses it to explore how power, authority and professional identity are discursively reproduced in the service of corporate instrumentality. CDA has been used to explore identity constructions in the Chinese context as well. For example, Kong (2001) analyzes the textual identity construction of sales agents in network marketing and the construction of the organization. Along with these authors, there are a numbers of authors who are also following a critical approach to discourse studies

but without labelling themselves explicitly as critical discourse analysts. These authors are mainly in the field of critical approaches to identity studies in organization research, as documented in the identity literature review chapter.

The theoretical assumptions of CDA make it a distinctive method different from traditional discourse analysis, but focusing on the macro-social and micro-linguistic aspects. The use of CDA in this study hopes to bring new understandings through its merits in its theoretical underpinnings.

## **4.2 Narrative**

Alongside the critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis will be used for data analysis. Narrative, as a methodology, has been applied in different disciplines with the 'linguistic turn' in social science research, including sociology, psychology, history, communication studies, anthropology, philosophy and organization studies (Boje 2001, Brown 2006, Czarniawska 2004, Humphreys and Brown 2002, Rhodes and Brown 2005). In general, there are five different areas to which the narrative method is applied in organization theory: 'sensemaking, communication, politics and power, learning/change, and identity and identification' (Rhodes and Brown 2005, p. 168).

Narratives are defined differently in different disciplines and even within the same discipline; the definition of narrative is disputed. Czarniawska (2004) defines narrative as 'a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected' (Czarniawska 2004). Though the term narrative is sometimes used interchangeably with 'story', Czarniawska differentiates them mainly through the element of plot. Narrative is 'purely chronological accounts'

and story is 'emplotted narratives' (Czarniawska 2004, p. 17). Boje holds a different idea from Czarniawska, holding a more traditional view that 'narrative requires plot, as well as coherence' and 'story is folksy, without emplotment, simple telling of chronology' (Boje 2001, p. 1). Narrative is 'theory that organization and other theorists use with stories' (Boje 2001, p. 2). However, elsewhere, Czarniawska also acknowledges that narrative needs a plot in order to become narrative and become a meaningful whole as noted by Boje (Czarniawska 1999 in Boje 2001). For this piece of research, Boje's definition of narrative will be adopted. Therefore, narrative in this research "is something that is narrated, i.e. 'story' " and "story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line" (Boje 2001, p. 1).

To supplement narratives both theoretically and methodologically, Boje recognizes the importance of the fragmented, unplotted stories and proposes an ante-narrative. The ante-narrative complements narrative by attending to ill formed partial storylines, which are in some ways incoherent in relation to established narrative themes. His definition of ante-narrative is similar to story, and ante-narrative is 'the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and improper storytelling' (Boje 2001, p. 1). Stories or ante-narrative could be transformed into narrative once the plot is added. Ante-narrative focuses on the analysis of the unstructured, fragmented storytelling in and around organizations. Boje's theorization of ante-narrative expands the scope of narrative analysis, taking both the plotted and structured, and unplotted and unstructured, storylines into consideration through the narrative and ante-narratives.

In this study, both the fragmented, incoherent identity ante-narratives authored by the sales managers and the coherent emplotted identity narratives also authored by the

sales managers are analyzed together to explore the multiple and fragmented identity constructions of the sales managers.

A deconstruction analytic approach will be adopted to analyze the narrative and ante-narrative data authored by sales managers. Deconstruction is defined by Joanne Martin, 'as an analytic strategy that exposes, in a systematic way, multiple ways a text can be interpreted' and 'deconstruction is able to reveal ideological assumptions in a way that is particularly sensitive to the suppressed interest of members of disempowered, marginalized groups' (Martin 1990, p. 340). Therefore, 'deconstruction is a technique and a philosophy of reading' (Czarniawska 2004, p. 96) and 'to 'deconstruct' a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means' (Norris 1988 in Czarniawska 2004, p. 96).

Boje and Dennehy (1993 in Boje 2001, p. 21) identify eight different deconstructive moves for the analysis of stories, as shown below:

1. *Duality search.*
2. *Reinterpret the hierarchy*
3. *Rebel voices*
4. *Other side of the story*
5. *Deny the plot*
6. *Find the exception*
7. *Trace what is between the lines*
8. *Resituate*

Among these eight deconstructive moves, the first one is particularly important to this study. The deconstructive move of duality search holds an assumption that 'stories are

told in ways that seek centers and proliferate many binary opposites: male/female, organization/environment, white/black' and a deconstructive reading of narratives for dualities of the binary opposites is to 'see the play of differences, how each term seeks to represent many different terms', 'how the author of a story has reversed his/her own (dualized) hierarchy of binary terms, privileging the marginal over the dominant' (Boje 2001, p. 23). Therefore, as an analytical strategy, it is necessary for duality search to 'make a list of any bipolar terms, any dichotomies that are used in the story' and 'include the term even if only one side is mentioned' (Boje and Dennehy 1993 in Boje 2001, p. 21) in order to deconstruct the constructions in narratives.

Narrative method has been widely used in organization studies. Organization is considered as a collective storytelling system by collective organizational actors (Boje 1991, Boje 1995). Via narrating stories, people contribute their individual stories to the collective stories of organization. Therefore, narrative constructs organizations (Boje 1991) and people make sense of the organization through the stories told in organizations (Humphreys and Brown 2002). For example, Hopkinson (2003) uses ten narratives to look at how narratives construct the organization through the construction of the delivery staff, their customers and manufacturers and the construction of their relationships. Brown and Jones (1998) analyzed different narratives which were used as a device to attribute the failure of projects in hospitals.

Narrative has been applied to the studies of identity and identification in organization as well. For these studies, a close relationship between identity and narrative is assumed. Identity is viewed to be constructed through narrative and exists as narratives (Carr 1986 , Currie 1998). Identity is also viewed as relational self-narrative (Gergen and Gergen 1988), as 'a narration rendered intelligible within ongoing relationships' (Gergen 1994, p. 186) with others. Therefore, the production

of self-narrative involves different narrators narrating stories to different audiences (Boje 1991).

Though stories could be told out of the many possible versions, stories are always narrated in a particular way. Telling a story in a certain way is a power effect. Regarded as a form of discursive practice, narrative constructs 'organizational actors, actions and relationships in particular way' (Rhodes and Brown 2005). As Clegg (1993) argued, power could be discursively represented; the dominance of certain narratives and the marginalization of others could best demonstrate the power effects in organizations. The different shared dominant narrative in organization represents different groups in power (Humphreys and Brown 2002). This shared narrative legitimizes the dominant practices and controls the subjective formation of identities in particular ways (Jermier et al., 1994).

Relating to my research, the sales managers' self-identities constructed in different Guanxi with their customers will be explored through the various identity narratives authored by them in this study. The different dominant and marginalised identity narratives in different contexts operating as the power effects will also be revealed in this study.

### **4.3 Metaphor**

Metaphor analysis will also be used as a tool for data analysis. Cornelissen et al. (2008) recently discussed the cognitive and discursive approaches to metaphors. This thesis adopts the latter approach and I look at their distinctions to clarify this approach. Metaphor analysis originates from cognitive theory, involves using one source to understand another source, assuming a transferable similar cognitive

experience from one to another. This classical cognitive theory of metaphor underpins the theoretical assumptions for metaphor analysis in so many disciplines. Metaphor analysis is also underpinned with other theoretical assumptions: discursive approaches to metaphors. The latter approach emphasizes the metaphor-in-use in conversations and the meaning constructions in language. This thesis follows the second approach of metaphors and sees metaphor analysis as part of discourse analysis. Here, the theoretical underpinnings of metaphor analysis, and how metaphor analysis is being used in organization research will be discussed.

Following Cornelissen et al. (2008) metaphor analysis is conducted in two different ways both in analytical focus ('projecting' metaphors versus 'eliciting' metaphor-in-use) and analytical form (cognitive linguistic – 'de-contextual' – versus discourse – 'contextual'- approach), each representing its own theoretical assumptions on metaphor analysis (Cornelissen et al., 2008).

For 'projecting' metaphors, researchers take a deductive approach to metaphor through imposing or projecting a metaphor onto the organizational reality based on their cognitive experience (Cornelissen et al., 2008). This approach is in line with the classical cognitive approach to metaphor theory and analysis, e.g. conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). 'The classical cognitive view on metaphor holds that metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon that is realized at the surface level of language' (Koller 2004, p. 9). The linguistic level metaphoric expressions at the surface are realizations of one underlying metaphor at the conceptual level. This conceptual metaphor represents a conceptual understanding of one entity through another entity. Therefore, a cognitive mapping of the similar features is assumed between the source and the target (Koller 2004). This mapping is grounded in physical and socio-cultural experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Aligned with this theoretical assumption, a 'de-contextualize' approach is taken as a methodological approach to the cognitive study of 'projecting' metaphors in organization research, focusing on 'identifying metaphors that are used across speakers and contexts of language use, and on abstracting cognitive meanings that are shared across such contexts' (Cornelissen et al., 2008, p. 11).

This cognitive approach to metaphor is used to theorize the organization research. Through a de-contextual approach, a conceptual metaphoric understanding of the organization is gained and through the instances of the de-contextualized metaphor. In Morgan's (2006) organization classic, he categorizes different theories in organization and different conceptual metaphors are imposed onto these theories. Through these new metaphoric ways of seeing the organization, new understanding is gained.

For the inductive elicitation approach, researchers are interested in 'metaphors that are inductively derived from the in situ natural talk and discursive interactions of people within organizations' (Cornelissen et al., 2008, p. 9). Metaphors are elicited from the language in use by organizational members. Metaphors 'feature as data on organizational reality and as symbolic devices that can be pinpointed and interpreted by an organizational researcher' (Cornelissen et al., 2008). It is the use and the context of the metaphor that are more of an interest to the researchers following this tradition, rather than seeing metaphors as a theoretical construct for organization. The study of metaphors therefore follows a more discursive approach, focusing on the context of the emergence of certain metaphors, the relationships of metaphor in interaction with other elements of discourse. This discursive theoretical underpinning for metaphor study views metaphors as a discursive practice, and stresses 'the functions performed by the use of a metaphor in that discourse' (Cornelissen et al., 2008).



Metaphor analysis is also being incorporated into CDA research. The ‘relatively superficial linguistic features of vocabulary and metaphor’ is the methodological focus of CDA for metaphor analysis. The socio-cultural use and the function of metaphors performed in discourse are emphasized, while the cognitive level of metaphor is less a concern for CDA, though this gap in CDA and cognitive linguistics has been closely linked with ideology and viewed as a feature of the ideologically invested language and discourse (Fairclough 1995). Since ‘different metaphors have different ideological attachments’, ‘the relationship between alternative metaphors’ is of particular interest in CDA (Fairclough 1989, p. 119). In the field of critical linguistics by which CDA is heavily influenced, metaphor is regarded as an indicator of discursive and socio-cultural struggle: ‘a potent factor in ideological contention, a means to bring an area into one rather than another ideological domain’ (Kress 1989 in Koller 2004, p. 28). In line with this, ‘metaphorical activity occurs at sites of difference, in struggles over power,... whenever an attempt is made to assimilate an event into one ideological system rather than another’ (Kress 1989 in Koller 2004, p. 28). In this way, metaphor helps to sustain the current status quo and the current power relationships.

In this thesis, metaphor analysis will be used and incorporated into discourse analysis. The research takes a discursive analytical approach; therefore an inductive approach towards metaphor analysis will be adopted here to explore metaphor-in-use of the sales managers.

In summary, this thesis takes an approach informed by CDA to study the identity construction of the organizational members. Viewing discourse as a social practice and as having a close attachment to power and context, CDA is suitable for this research in exploring the sales managers’ discursive identity construction in the

context of both the Guanxi discourse and in the unequal power relationships with their customers. Metaphor and narratives are taken as aspects of discursive social practice within CDA. At the textual levels, metaphors and narratives employed by the sales managers is an instance of discursive practice and further an instance of social practice. Therefore, in this study, taking a critical discourse analytic approach, metaphor analysis and the narratives in which the metaphors are enacted will be analyzed to explore the dominant ideology in different contexts.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I discuss three different methodologies used in this study: Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis and metaphor analysis. Their different theoretical assumptions are explored and the parts that are relevant for this study are highlighted. Technically, it also introduces the relevant strategy involved in narrative analysis: duality search. This chapter provides a theoretical guideline for the data analysis. In the next chapter, I will look at how these methodologies are applied in the actual research context and in data analysis.

## Chapter 5 Research Methods

In this chapter, in line with the social constructionist methodological approaches chosen for this study, research methods used for this study are discussed. Two different research methods are used for this study: participant observation, qualitative in-depth interviews. To start with, I will discuss two initial data collection attempts before the actual data collection, which are important attempts in the sense that they have shaped my thinking about what are the more desirable methods and have led to the adoption of these two research methods. I will continue with the discussion of the two research methods and how they are being used in this study. After this, I will discuss in detail about the role of the researcher throughout this research project: how I position myself in the research field and build up Guanxi with the participants. This feature of the study: the researcher doing Guanxi while doing Guanxi research is important. This study is unique in that it recognizes this as a feature which has been ignored in previous Guanxi research.

Then I will move on to discuss the data collection in the research site. This section will mainly address practical issues of: how I get access to the research site; what is the organization and its members in this study; in what kind of research activities that I am involved; and what kind of data I collect. Through this detailed description of the data collection process, I aim to establish how the data is shaped by the research questions; how the joint-methods benefit the data collection in that the collected data is richer than the usual interview methods. After this section on data collection, I will discuss the data analysis process: how the data is managed, how they are being transcribed and translated; how the analysis is carried out; what steps are involved in the data analysis. Through this chapter, I hope to link the methodologies to

the actual data collection analysis, and provide the detailed background information of the research site where this study takes place.

## **5.1 Research Methods**

In this study, two methods will be used for collecting data. They are participant observation and qualitative in-depth interviews. The choice of these two methods is based on a prior study that I conducted before the actual data collection.

### **5.1.1 Prior Study**

Before the actual data collection, two initial prior studies are conducted to explore the gap in literature in 2007. In the first study, a 30 minute interview is conducted with an MBA student who works in a Bank and sells financial products to customers. The interview is conducted in a semi-structured manner, giving a few prompts to the interviewee. However, the data collected is problematic and superficial, in that the interviewee tries to provide a scientific and direct ‘answer’ to the questions that I raised, with less opinion involved. Since this interviewee is introduced by a friend of mine, it is the first time I meet her in the interview. The atmosphere in the interview is quite formal, making us feel a bit nervous. This might have an impact on the interviewee’s ‘answer’-like accounts of her experience. This attempt makes me rethink formal interviews as a major tool for data collection and the researcher’s role in collecting data. The creation of a relaxed atmosphere and a trusting relationship with the participant is very important for interviews. Also this attempt makes me reflect upon my interview skills as well: the way that I raise a question, the way that

questions are framed. With the problems that I identified in terms of the formal interviews, I decide to try to do a second study, but with a slightly different approach.

The second study is conducted a few months later in 2007, which involves interviews of 10 sales managers in different industries and participant observation on a two-day sales visit with one of the sales managers. Most of the 10 sales managers are my own friends, or friends of their friends. Interviews are mainly conducted in a conversational and relaxed manner. Rather than conducting interviews in a formal office setting and a structured manner, I conduct the interviews mainly over lunch or dinner in a restaurant as part of my 'gathering-together' with these friend. Therefore, the interviews are enacted and integrated within our 'catching-up' with each other. The questions are framed more as open questions, inviting the interviewees to elaborate upon their responses. These interviews are quite successful in that the interviewees are very relaxed and give vivid narrative accounts of their sales practice with their customers. It happens that one of them, which is a friend of mine, needs to be on a 2-day sales trip within the same city, visiting different customers. He offers me a chance to see how he actually does sales with his customers. I take the chance to participate in the sales trip as a participant observer. We visit a few customers' companies. He explains to me before and after meeting each sales manager: why he does some activities with some customers. This trip offers me a chance to really see 'how sales are practiced in a natural setting' rather than hear 'the account of how sales are practiced'.

Based on this second attempt of the approach, I begin to reflect further upon what methods fit and bring more rigours to my research. Compared to the first attempt, the advantage of the informal interviews and the participant observation is quite evident. The informal interviews with my friends with whom I have established a trusting

relationship which allows more of an insider perspective of their practice, since some of the activities will remain hidden to researchers who are strangers (Flick 2002). At the same time, the benefit of participant observation offers me a fresh take on the sales practice in a different light by situating sales in an actual context. My understandings of their sales practice is definitely deepened by observing 'how they do sales'. Methodologically, these two methods seem to complement each other as well: they offer accounts of the sales practice in different contexts.

The third thing I find from the second study, which also becomes a focus of my thesis, is an identity approach that the sales managers take in their Guanxi practice with their customers. Alongside the identity approach, the way they see their Guanxi with their customers as 'friends' as 'Guanxi with emotions' are also very new to me. The recurring reference of these two terms makes me not only reflect upon my research question, but also my research methods. Though the term of 'friend' is mentioned in the first study, the term 'Guanxi with emotions' is very new to me and the focus on the emotions between the sales managers and the customers are also counter-intuitive. However, these two terms seem to be common sense for the sales managers in the second study. How come the second term is never mentioned in the first study? Instead, in the first study, the interviewer tries to define her Guanxi with the customers as more rational and emotionally detached, which is different from the second studies. I wonder if it is because she wants to project a professional image, in front of me, as a good sales manager who is emotionally detached from the customers. While in the second study, those interviewees who are my friends tell me two different accounts of their 'friend' identity: emotionally attached in front of the customers and emotionally detached without the presence of the customers. These paradoxical findings from the two studies make me rethink the role of the researcher in obtaining different

perspectives of data: the data presented to the outsiders and the data presented to the insider.

Because of the advantages shown in the second studies for my research, I decide to use the participant observation and qualitative in-depth interviews as a more desirable and more appropriate methods for data collection, which will be explained further in the next section.

### **5.1.2 Participant observation**

Participant observation is a form of observation, with an emphasis on the role of the researcher as a participant in the studied field during the observation process. This data collecting method is regarded as an ‘an essential element of all qualitative studies’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 106). Compared to other research methods, like interviews, it requires the researcher’s ‘firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for study’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 106). The actual practices in the social world could be studied through participant observation, rather than the accounts of the actual practices as made available in interviews (Flick 2002). In the research field, the researcher’s ‘immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 106).

Denzin’s definition of participant observation captures better the actual practice of this data collecting method: it is ‘a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection’ (Denzin 1989, p. 157-158) Participant observation

involves different research practice from qualitative interviews and Jorgensen (1989 cited in Flick 2002) lists seven main features of participant observation.

1. *Special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and settings.*
2. *Location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the foundation of inquiry and method.*
3. *A form of theory and theorizing stressing interpretation and understanding of human existence.*
4. *A logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence*
5. *An in-depth, qualitative, case study approach and design*
6. *The performance of a participant role or roles that involves establishing and maintaining relationships with natives in the field and*
7. *The use of direct observation along with other methods of gathering information.*

(Jorgensen cited in Flick 2002, p. 220)

As suggested by the name and also indicated from the above list of features, the researcher's role as a participant is crucial for this method during the research process. After the discussion of the second method used in this study: the qualitative in-depth interview in the following section, I will discuss the role of the researcher for the data collection process: the importance of the researcher's role; what role I adopt in the



studied field; how this role influences the data collection; the ethics involved in the research and the reciprocity issues involved with the organization that offers access.

### **5.1.3 Qualitative In-depth Interviews**

Interviews are classified into different types, though different authors tend to classify them somewhat differently. Flick (2002) classifies interviews into five types: the focused interviews, semi-structured interviews, the problem-centred interview, the expert interview and the ethnographic interview.

A second method used for this study is in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (Kahn and Cannell 1957, p. 149). Qualitative in-depth interviews are ‘much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories’ and the researcher could ‘explore a few general topics to help uncover the participants’ views but otherwise respects how the participants frame and structure the responses’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 108).

Compared to participant observation, the interview has the strength of collecting a large amount of data within a short period of time and when used in combination with observation, ‘interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activity’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 110).

Therefore qualitative in-depth interviews are also used here to explore the subjective views of the interviewees as seen from their perspective. This method is used alongside the participant observation method discussed above.

However, the interview as a method also has its weakness. It requires the interviewer to have a lot of personal interaction with the interviewee to gain willingness and

cooperation from them (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Otherwise, the interviewees are reluctant to disclose their views in the interviews. This points to the importance of the role of the researcher in the research process, not only in participant observation, but also in the interviews as well, which will be fully discussed in the following section.

#### **5.1.4 The Researcher's Role**

The role of the researcher in the research process of participant observation has been discussed in the literature of observational research. Adler and Adler (1987) present a discussion of the historical treatment of the researcher's role in observational research drawing on three different theoretical traditions. The purpose here is not to engage in the theoretical discussions of the researcher's role, but to present the different views on the roles and discuss the particular view that I take for my study in a practical manner. Therefore these different schools of thought on the researcher's role will be acknowledged and but will not be elaborated upon in detail.

The first view on the researcher role is based on the classical Chicago school's conceptualisation of research. In line with this tradition, four roles are proposed in Gold's (1958 in Adler and Adler 1998, p. 84 ) classic typology of research roles: 'complete participant; the participant-as-observer; the observer-as- participant; and the complete observer'. This view on the researcher's role is in line with the traditional view of the 'objective' researcher who sees the researcher's influence in the field as bias and "emphasize(s) the scientific distancing from the 'object' of research" (Flick 2002, p. 115). Observers are either non-interactive or interactive in the context of

scientific distancing, and do not cross into the domains of friendship with the participants in the study (Adler and Adler 1998).

This view on the researcher's role is different from the other two views based on existential sociology and ethnomethodology in which more involvement with the object of research is emphasized. For both of these two traditions, the type of research access 'is obtained by completely fusing with the research object' (Flick, 2002). In line with these views on researcher roles, Adler and Adler (1998) propose three types of membership roles in the setting that researchers could adopt: peripheral membership role; active membership role; and complete membership role (Adler and Adler 1998). These three roles indicate different memberships of the researcher in the setting, as shown below:

*Peripheral memberships: 'observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership'.*

*Active membership role: become more involved in the setting's central activities, assuming responsibilities that advance the group, but without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals.*

*Complete membership role: study scenes where they are already members or those who become converted to genuine membership during the course of their research.*

*(Adler and Adler 1998, p. 85)*

In this study, I share the same idea with Adler and Adler (1998) and adopt a role of active membership. In this field, I was assigned some responsibilities as a sales manager: doing sales visits, acting as an assistant for the sales managers in business fairs, talking to potential customers and doing translation work for the sales managers in business meetings.

Adopting an active membership role requires the researcher to engage more in building a trusting relationship with the participants in the field and to establish an insider identity (Adler and Adler 1998). This is different from the traditional approach of the researcher's outsider identity as a 'professional stranger' to maintain distance with the participants (Agar 1980 in Flick 2002). Flick (2002) argued that certain activities are not disclosed to the researchers as outsiders and strangers and researchers are only presented one set of reality: the exterior presentations. Establishing an insider identity provides access to these activities from the perspective of the participants.

Following this line of argument for the active membership role, I see the researcher's role as an instrument rather than a bias in the data collection research process. In this way, I engage myself in activities of relationship-building with my participants and develop gradually from having an outsider identity to an insider identity.

Methodologically, this active membership role I adopt is particularly meaningful in the context of this study of Guanxi. In this research, I need to deploy myself to build up relationship, in this context: Guanxi, with my participants to obtain a greater willingness from both the organization and the participant to grant me the level of access as an insider in the site. This guanxi-building process for me as a researcher is more about constructing a membership identity in the group of participants, while at

the same time, this research is to explore how sales managers construct their different identities with their different groups of industrial customers for the sake of building good Guanxi. There are two paralleling Guanxi practices going on in the field: the researcher's practice of Guanxi with the sales managers as participants in the field, and the sales manager's own practice of Guanxi with their customers. In these two paralleling processes, identity construction to gain group membership is crucial for the researcher and for the customers. In this research context, the researcher's successful Guanxi building with the participants is particularly critical for this research: the depth and the breadth shown in the data are made possible gradually as my identity is recognized as a member in the group. In the following section, I will elaborate upon how Guanxi is practiced throughout the research process to do research on Guanxi. Through this I show how the traditional view of the researcher's objective and distancing role becomes an obstacle for this study, and how the researcher's so called 'biased' active role becomes an instrument for this study, which is otherwise made impossible.

## **5.2 Researcher's Guanxi Practice:**

Throughout the research process, the researcher uses and cultivates Guanxi in different stages of the research process, including: getting access to the research site; interacting with the participant; and collecting data in the site. These stages will be discussed in detail here.

### **5.2.1 Getting Access:**

In order to get access to the research field, two approaches are used to get in touch with a target company. The first approach is through the Chinese alumni in the China Management Centre in the Management School. I get in touch with the China Centre, explain my research aims and express my needs in getting access to a company in China. I was then given a brief list of the Chinese past graduates from Lancaster University and the companies they are working for at that moment. Due to protection of the privacy of the graduates, only very brief information of the graduates is given and the name of the company, the position they are holding and the names of the graduates are all anonymous. I am looking for access to the sales or purchasing department of a Chinese company which is engaged in relationships with industrial customers in a supply chain. Based on the list, I only have a very vague idea of the industry in which the graduates are working, and the possible seniority of their position in the company. Since no specific job positions and job responsibilities are given from the list, I could only guess which company might fit my research aim and whether the graduate is senior enough to grant me an access. In this case, an initial email is constructed to ask for possible access to the company. I understand that the email should be tailored to the each company and each person that I get in touch with. However, the limited information and my lack of industry experience make me encounter quite a lot of difficulty in figuring out what the past graduates are interested in and how to frame my research in a way that is of interest and benefit to those people. At the end, the same email is sent out to only a selection of graduates. However, I did not get any reply from them. There are many reasons for this failed attempt: maybe the person I ask is not senior enough; maybe the research is of no interest to the graduates at all. There is no way for me to find out the real reason, so I move on quickly to another method.

Learning from the previous failed experience, I decide to change my approach of asking access to companies. Instead of sending emails to many companies and hoping for a reply, I get into touch with my own contacts and see whether they could help me to locate the access.

My supervisor suggests a person, whom we both know, who might be able to help. This person is a Chinese visiting professor in Lancaster University who is in charge of a three-year international joint research project between Lancaster University and three other universities, including the one he in which is based. He is in a senior administration position in his university: dean of a school in a business-based Chinese university in which he works. He is not a scholar working in the field of management, but he seems to be very well connected with management scholars as well, since he has been invited for guest talks in the China Management Centre in Lancaster University a few times and his university is very much business-oriented. Considering his senior position in China and his connection with management scholars, he seems to be a person who might be able to help me with the access to companies. Another very important reason that I get in touch with him is that he is a person that both my supervisor and I know in person, i.e. having Guanxi with. This approach of relying on my own contact is very different from the previous approach of relying on complete strangers: past Chinese graduates. Since it is an approach of deploying my own and my supervisor's Guanxi, it is worthwhile to mention how my supervisor and I get to know this person.

I am introduced to him in 2006 by my Chinese coursemate at my master degree ceremony at Lancaster University. At that time, he is a work colleague of this course mate in the Chinese university and he is to attend the degree ceremony. He had just arrived in Lancaster and did not know anyone. He is very happy to be introduced to

me, a postgraduate who will continue to study in Lancaster. We exchange contact details right away. Later we become more familiar with each other in a two-day Chinese management conference organized by him at Lancaster University. My supervisor gets to know him at the conference. It is under the context of such a professional relationship and friendship established between him and me that I get into touch with him, hoping to get help from a friend and a professional colleague.

An email is therefore constructed as a result of the advice from my supervisor to get into touch with him and ask for help. The email briefly introduces my research project and expresses my wishes of help with research access to a company. The second day, he replies and kindly offers to help. A meeting is arranged on the third day to discuss the type of access I am looking for. In the meeting, I pass my supervisor's thanks to him for the help he offered. Then we discuss in more detail about what kind of company I am looking for. He kindly promises to get in touch with a friend of his owning a company of natural food flavor and pigments. After that, we have some 'small talks' about research and about life in UK. The meeting lasts for around an hour. I feel that he is very nice, kind and helpful. However, in the meeting, the reciprocity principle of Guanxi is in action, though not very explicit. Apart from the small talk and the help he offers, he also shows a great interest in my research and my supervisor's research. He takes the initiative to ask me whether I have a second supervisor and if not, he would like to be my second supervisor. I am surprised by idea of his being a 'second supervisor', since he is not a member of the academic staff in the university which might make it impossible at the institution level and he does not know my research area at all. I imagine that if he could supervise a doctoral student from a UK university, it might look good on his CV. I don't know how to answer and I say that I need to ask my supervisor's view. At the same time, he seems



to be interested in my supervisor's research as well. We discuss a lot about my supervisor's research interest and the journal articles that she publishes. My personal opinion at that time is that he might want to collaborate with my supervisor. At the end of the meeting, he promises to get in touch with his friend and also asks me to send his regards to my supervisor indicating that he is more than happy to help out.

On the fourth day after getting in touch with him, he emails me to indicate that my access to the company is granted and asks me to get in touch with his friend. His friend is actually the vice president in the company. I email his friend with my CV. His friend gives me full autonomy in terms of the duration of the data collection and the time to start my project in the company at a time of my convenience. The only thing the company expects from me is a training session or a company report at the end of my research project. I agree with the request from the company and the access to the organization is settled.

Reflecting upon my two approaches to locating access to the research site, it could be seen that right from the beginning Guanxi is in action and it is so important in Chinese social life. In the first approach, when my personal Guanxi is absent, getting access is so difficult and time-consuming. In the second approach where Guanxi is practiced as a flow from one person to another person, getting access becomes so simple and easy. Within 24 hours, permission to the field has been given just based on the recommendation of the professor, without knowing my research goals and objectives. The Guanxi is not only practiced between me and the professor and between the professor and his friend, the principle of reciprocity in Guanxi is closely observed as well in our interactions. Both my supervisor and I send out a few emails to the professor to express our gratitude for the great help. I also invite my supervisor and the professor to lunch as a gesture to say thank you to him. Gift is also presented to

him to express my gratitude. Though it exists in one form or another, the way I gain the contact and access to the site has already pointed to the role of Guanxi in Chinese social life.

### **5.2.2 Informed Consent:**

Being aware of the research ethics as a researcher, on my first day in the organization, I present my research project briefing and research consent forms in both Chinese and English to the vice president, the friend of the professor, in the company. In this consent form, regarding the possible negative association of Guanxi, I follow Taylor and Bogdan's (1984, p. 25) approach of 'truth but vague' to describe my research purpose. Instead of saying I am researching in Guanxi explicitly, I describe my research is about 'customer relationship management' in a Chinese context. In the consent form, specifically, I ask for permission to fully record digitally all the interactions which happen in the research field on a daily basis. At the same time, I also protect the participants' rights and state in the consent form that the digital recorder will be switched off whenever the researcher is asked to do so and will only be used for academic purposes. Consent is given by the vice president and signed by the General Manager later. Following the vice president, sales managers give their consent to the recording as well.

Though the negative influence of recorders as obtrusive to the research setting has been widely discussed (Flick 2002), the negative effect of the recorder seem to decrease gradually, achieving some naturalness in the research setting, since the participants in the field appear to be more comfortable with it gradually and sometimes they even forget about the recorders in the field.

### **5.2.3 Interaction with the Participants:**

After I gain access to the research site, I am faced with ‘the problem of how to reach those persons within it’ (Flick 2002). In the setting, the participants’ willingness to disclose themselves is crucial and this depends on the researcher’s ‘building trust, maintaining good relationships’ with the participants (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p. 85). In order to get the participant to be willing to disclose themselves with my presence in the field, I make great efforts in establishing a good and trusting relationship with them. As my relationship or friendship with them strengthens, my researcher’s role is in action in the actual data collection, helping me to get an insider perspective on the participants, to the events happening in the company and I am offered more help from the participants. My researcher’s role in building trusting relationships with them is participant-oriented. Here, I will discuss how I am treated at the beginning of my data collection before my membership with them is established; how I interact with them to build up a good Guanxi and gradually establish my membership; and how I am treated by them along with my gradual Guanxi strengthening and membership recognition.

On my first day in the research field, I am introduced by the vice president who is the friend of the professor, to the head of the sales department and I am allocated to be in the same office where all sales managers locate. Then I am formally introduced by the head of the sales department to the sales managers’ one by one, and then two secretaries for the sales department as well. I am introduced by the head as ‘Doctor Ou’ and as doctoral researcher from a British university. In my interaction with them, they all address me as ‘Doctor Ou’ with a lot of respect and our interaction is quite formal. The formal and polite manner of interaction between the sales managers and me lasts for a while, especially the first week. During my first week of participant

observation, the sales managers see me more as a researcher who is an expert in the field of marketing and superior to them, especially after I explain to them my research is 'customer relationship management. The reason why I phrase it in this way is explained in the section on research ethics. They provide me with a lot of factual information about the department, their customers, their job responsibilities, their products and their sales plans. Their account of the sales practice is like an informative, concise and abstract summary of their sales practice, with a lot of terms like customers' wants and needs, customers' relationships, and market share. It is quite surprising that at the beginning, whenever they talk about how they build up relationships with their customers, they all tend to pattern their practice through a few identical and simple formula-like steps. These steps replicate considerably about the customer needs and wants in marketing theory. I find that they all tend to provide their account in theoretical language, with some of them more theoretical and some less theoretical. Their account strikes me as though they might want to be perceived as intelligent and scientific in front of a doctoral researcher who they think is an expert in marketing and sales. That is why they tend to speak in such a theoretical manner and orient towards my research interest in 'customer relationship management'.

At the beginning, my level of access to the company is very limited. I could not have access to any documents or electronic data base about their customer profiles. There is no document or briefing for me to give a basic understanding of the managerial and institutional practice of the company. The company is very small and they do not have any training material for those newly recruited. Therefore I could not find anything as orientation material either. The only person who takes the initiative to give me some basic information about the company and the sales department is the head of the sales managers. However, the introduction is mainly about the structures of the sales

department, brief job descriptions of the sales managers and the products of the company. During my participant observation of the sales managers in the company, my access to the sales managers is very limited as well. Most of the time, the sales managers engage themselves in their routine and mundane activities which to me seem a bit confused. They mainly are either browsing on the internet, or an electronic data base containing the information of their customers, or chatting with their customers on the phone and through MSN. It seems to me that they are very relaxed and have few things to do in the company. I spot the head of the sales managers browsing internet websites for hours very often. However, no one tells me why they seem to be so relaxed for days as sales managers and no one tells me how they actually do sales. I feel more like a new employee, but without a supervisor telling me what my jobs are. I could only sit there, observe and guess. Every now and then during my observation, I will ask them casual but specific questions like: 'what are you doing?' or 'who is this customer that you are talking to over the phone?' to get the sales managers to let me know more about their job and also have a glimpse of how they actually do sales. However, the answers from them are quite straight forward. The answer mainly explains the 'what' they are doing; with very little explanation of 'why' it needs to be done and 'how' it is going to be done' in that context. The disclosure of their jobs and routines is quite limited. I only have quite a fragmented and superficial understanding of what they are doing in the office, but could not link them together within a sales practice context.

In the office, the sales managers play jokes on each other very often and it seems that the office is more like the common room for people to do chatting, rather than work. Almost all of them seem to have a nickname and they address each other through the nicknames. Their nicknames are very casual and indicate a great level of relaxation

and familiarity among themselves. The nicknames include: ‘demon’, ‘pig’, ‘Chairman Hu’ (a name for an employee who shares the same surname with the current Chinese chairman Hu Jintao), mother He (a name for male employee). Though their interaction is very relaxed, my interaction with them is quite formal and no one plays jokes on me. I am very respectfully addressed as ‘Doctor Ou’.

I realize that I am being treated as a superior and respectful outsider by the sales managers through: the ways that they interact with me, the disclosure of their routines and activities and the way I am being addressed. However, from the first day I enter the research field, I have been trying to establish a membership in the group and have been making a lot of efforts in my interaction with the participants. In the next section, I am going to talk about how I interact with the participants to gradually obtain an insider identity in the research field, which benefits my data collection enormously.

#### **5.2.4 Constructing the Researcher’s Identity as an Insider in the Field:**

In order to obtain a better level of access to the participants in the field, I make great effort in establishing an insider identity among participants. My general approach to establishing my identity is engaging in as many routine and mundane activities with them as possible, regardless of whether it is related to work or related to life. I take an approach of building friendship with them, being sensitive to engagement in different activities associated with female and male colleagues, and also of paying attention to their individual differences in the friendship building process.

In general, I approach the participants through mainly engaging in the same activities with them in the work place, adopting the same interaction style as they do with each other, helping them proactively as much as possible and doing gift-giving with them. I observe their daily schedule and daily activity carefully, then adjust my timetable and

activity to be synchronized with them. My daily activities include three types: the routine activity that every participant does in the work place; the different work-related activities that I engage with every day; and activities in which I engage with them in the personal life. I carefully observe their work routines and strictly follow this routine. By practising this routine, I try to be seen as a member at least on a superficial level and try to blend myself into the group as much as possible. The first routine I adopt is the attendance routine. The working hours for the company are from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm in the afternoon, with 12 noon-2pm as the lunch break. The sales managers normally arrive at 8:25am and leave at 6pm. I try to arrive a little earlier than them to establish a hardworking image, but leave with them. By doing so, I could walk to the bus stop with them and have some informal chat with them. Shortly after I arrive at the company, I find that some of them always go to a restaurant near the company for breakfast on a daily basis. I adopt this practice, bump into them very often in the morning and have informal chats with them. At lunch time, I join them and order from the same restaurant for lunch take-away. I also join their lunch at the common room on a big table, which accommodates all the sales managers. The vice president, the friend of the professor, normally joins the sales managers for lunch. I have chances to talk to her as well on a daily basis. After lunch, I adopt their practice of having a lunch nap as well, since the lights in the big sales office will be switched off and all of them will fall asleep in their chairs. I follow them and take a lunch nap on my chair as well.

Apart from the attendance routines and daily routines, I also adjust myself to the same dressing code. Most of them dress very casually; jeans and T-shirt are daily dress for the sales managers if they stay in the office and are not meeting any customers. So I change my formal dressing code to wear jeans and T-shirt like the sales managers do.

In the field, in my daily interaction with them, I engage in activities to make myself perceived as a friendly and helpful colleague; a 'doctoral student' who is an 'inexperienced' industry practitioner and wants to learn things from them, rather than a superior doctoral researcher as seen in their eyes. Being introduced by the vice president to the company, the sales managers guess I have some special connection with their boss and they treat me with extra respect. As mentioned above, my doctoral researcher identity makes them feel that I am more superior than them. Also before I arrive at the company, the vice president inform them that there will be a doctoral researcher, who have internal expertise about sales and marketing, will be giving them a 3-day training session about sales practice in England. I did not promise a training session to the vice president. When I am told on the first day by the head of the sales department, I am very surprised as well and understand how come they always treat me as an expert. Therefore, I mainly reconstructs a friendly friend identity and a learning, humble 'student' identity when I interaction with them on the personal level and on the work level. For example, I take the initiative to prepare tea for them when they wake up from the lunch break. It is their habit of having a cup of tea after they wake up from the lunch nap. Normally they prepare for their own tea. My tea-making gesture is very welcomed by them and helps to break the boundaries between me and my participants to some degree, especially at the beginning.

Every day in the field, there is one routine activity that the sales managers often engage in: cigarette breaks. The four most senior sales managers are heavy smokers and they have a habit of smoking together in a corner of the building at a certain time. Four of them or two of them will go out 4 or 5 times a day for cigarette breaks. Each time will last around 10-15 minutes and sometimes half an hour. They chat a lot during the break. Although I am not a smoker, I try to go to these smoking breaks with



an excuse of needing some fresh air. At the beginning, I could only go with them every now and then. Later when I become more familiar with one or two of them, during my informal conversation, they will suggest that we carry on the conversation outside the office, so that they could smoke a cigarette. These managers normally go in pairs, so I get chances to get to know the other one as well if I go out with one of them. They become much more relaxed during the break and they talk in a more personal manner, though with my presence, the content of the talk is still superficial. Gradually, when I become more familiar with them, I become a member of the cigarette break 'club', I am known by them initially as a non-smoker for a break, later as a 'second hand cigarette smoker'. This cigarette breaks are so crucial for my building up a good relationship with them. I get to know them better and get much more familiar with them in person during these short but frequent breaks, and get recognition as a 'smoker' as well. The conversations during these breaks are mainly informal and fun, but sometimes they talk about work as well. As my presence in the break becomes a routine and gets recognition, the content of their speech changes from superficial fun topics to some private conversations at later stages.

At the beginning, my conversation with them is mainly based on a few superficial topics, and interactional in nature. For example, they ask me something very general about England, football, food, study. They appear friendly and approachable, very good at leading the conversations. I normally follow their conversation, making it more interactional rather than a very structured question-answer informational conversation. At that time, it happens to be the 2008 Olympic Games in China. Every day, they talk very often about how the news from the Olympic Games. Following their interest in the topic, I collect information about it on a daily basis, and then bring them up in conversations with them. They also talk about news from politics and

society very much. I also collected information on a daily basis to prepare this informal conversation with them.

Regarding the activities related to the work, I always silently listen to their conversation and observe. For a lot of common sense knowledge in the sales practice which I don't know, I will not be embarrassed to ask and the way I ask them is often like a 'student-teacher' interaction. They feel my humble attitude and the teacher-like respect from me as well. They all seem to be willing to teach me about their work experiences. Also, I try to offer help whenever they need it and also take the initiative to do all the interpretation and translation work during a business conference. Since none of them speaks good English and at that time they could not find a proper interpreter, my help is very timely for them. They are much more willing to participate after that.

Apart from the above general activities and interaction with the participants to build up friendship with them, I also engage friendship-building gender-specific and person-specific activities to build up friendship on a more personal level. The sales managers are mainly male, except for one of them. The men like to talk about the Olympic Games, football, women, money. As a female researcher, I do not have a thorough knowledge in these areas and it is quite difficult for me to have a deep conversation with them in these areas. However, my inexperience, age and student image helps me a lot to position myself appropriately among these sales managers. Since most of the managers are quite some years older than me, I position myself as, to some extent, a 'naïve young student' who learns and needs help from the experienced managers as 'teachers' in the field to understand the sales practices. As a student to them, I show a lot of teacher-like respect to them. These sales managers enjoy being looked up to by a 'perceived intelligent doctoral student'. They also enjoy being seen as

knowledgeable in front of a doctoral student from UK. My self-positioning with these managers who are older than me, is quite often a mixture of 'student' and 'friend' identities. My interaction with two other male managers, who are similar in age to me, is more on a 'friendship' level. These two managers are very new to the industry and very junior as well. Both of them are seeing their relationships with the senior managers as 'master teacher-student' relationships, which is very similar to my positioning. Maybe because of similarity in age and inexperience in the industry, it is very easy for us to talk to each other and we share a lot of things in common. One of them even invites me to his home and cooks a farewell dinner for me when I finish my data collection.

My interaction with the females is quite different from the males. Though I interact with quite a number of different females in the field, it mainly involves 3 people who are very much related to my data collection in the company: the sales department secretary; the one female sales manager; and the vice president.

The sales department secretary locates in the same office as all the sales managers and me. Though she is not engaged in the sales work, she is an insider with the group of sales managers. She is very welcoming on my first day of data collection and even takes the initiative searching for an accommodation for my data collection period. She is very friendly and we have small talks almost every day since our desks are very near. We sometimes have dinner together in a restaurant and go shopping together at weekends. She seems to be interested in two topics in particular: relationships with men and beauty products. These sometimes form the topics of our conversations. As for the only sales manager, she is mainly based in Shanghai and I only get the chance to work with her for 2 weeks during my two-week business trip in Shanghai. However, since I stay with her in the same hotel room during the two-week business trip, we are

practically living together for 2 weeks. Every day, we are busy with travelling around to visit customers and talk mainly about the customers. She is very nice and kind. We get along very well with each other. We talk about work very often, since she explains about the schedule for the next day and treats me as a member of the team. When we have time, she likes to talk about her relationship with her boyfriend, who is also a sales manager in the company. She talks about the gossips in the companies as well. Maybe both the two girls are a similar age to me; we get along with each other very well and have 'girl's talk' very often. My friendship establishes with them quite easily.

As for the vice president, the interaction is a bit different, because of her position in the management hierarchy. She seems to be very friendly, welcoming and helpful throughout the data collection stage. She is the first person I see when I arrive in the city for the data collection. She invites me to a welcoming dinner on the day of my arrival in the city. The chat is quite informal, mainly getting to know each other and talking about general topics. As time goes by, we chat in the corridor and she joins our lunch in the common room, we have more chances to know each other. She is very approachable and she invites me to a few more dinners alone. The chat with her over dinner is very enjoyable and relaxing. We move on to more life-related topics and I know more about her life. She seems to be living quite a lonely life, since her husband works in another province and they can only see each other once a month. Her only son is in a boarding school and she only sees him once a week. She is the only person living in her home. I imagine she might be a bit lonely and, she enjoys a dinner with me. We mainly talk about relaxed subjects like: fashion; and dieting. She seems especially interested in dieting and weight loss. She tries out the advices that I give her immediately. We sometimes talk about life in UK and the professor as well, and the interaction between us becomes more personal. She sometimes reveals some of

her personal ideas with me regarding the company and the members in the companies as well. We get along quite well, and I am invited to her home before I leave the company.

My identity construction as a friend with these organizational members in different positions is quite successful through my engagement in activities in their daily life, my interaction with them.

My shift in identity from an outsider to an insider could be revealed through the change in their way of addressing me. When I gradually become more familiar with them, I adopt their ways of addressing each other, like addressing one of the male sales managers as 'mother', 'brother', 'demon', 'pig'. At the beginning, I am addressed as 'doctor Ou' and later, I am addressed by them via my first name 'Juanjan'. Also, I got nick names from them as well: 'worm' and 'curious little girl'. 'Worm' is a very neutral nick name which indicates one who always follows others. Since I observe a lot and follow them to a lot of places, they give me this nick name. The 'little girl' is used since in their eyes I am a very junior and 'inexperienced' business practitioner. They always used these two nicknames to play jokes on me, like what they do with other colleagues. The way I am being addressed gradually implies my identity moving from an outsider of the group to an insider of the group.

My identity shift from an outsider to an insider could also be revealed though their levels of disclosure about themselves, about others and about the organizations, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **5.2.5 Level of Disclosure:**

During my interaction and my identity construction as friend and as a young inexperienced student researcher, my Guanxi with them gradually builds up. In accordance with my identity confirmation as an insider, I begin to be able to have access to more personal viewpoints, more different organizational scenes of the sales manager's sales practices.

The level of disclosure of the sales managers changes a lot after my membership construction. A common feature reflected in the content of our communication is that they reveal more about themselves, about their sales practice, about the organization and their colleagues.

At the beginning, my office participant observation has some breakthroughs in terms of data. The observation in the office is very fragmented, since I have no idea of the prior events of each customer. I could only observe the 'how' and 'what' of the sales managers' interaction with the customers. Quite often, I am not provided with sufficient information on 'why' the interaction happens in this way. Only the minimal amount of disclosure about their job is given. At the same time, my venue for observation is very limited to one place only, which is mainly in the office. I could not really see 'how' sales are practiced in the actual setting. Along with my establishing my insider identity, gradually the sales managers will proactively explain to me what they are doing, how they are going to do it and why they do it in great detail and in simple languages. They will even include some more examples to make me understand. For example, once, one of the sales managers makes a few different phone calls to a few customers to show me how he communicates differently with different customers, with different focus. Regarding the venue for data collection, later, I am offered two one-week business trips with two senior managers and a one-week

business conference, to be 'on the set' with sales managers visiting their customers. One of the one-week business trips is actually specially organized for me to collect data in a spontaneous setting of sales manager-customer interaction. During both of the two trips, the sales managers are very supportive of my data collection. Before we visit each customer, they will give me an introduction of the customer and indicate the purpose of the sales visit. After the visit, they will also comment upon the visit, why certain things need to be said, what are the implications of the customers, why the customer need to be handled in this way. They are like mentors in the company, supervising me on how to be a good sales manager.

My relationship with the key gatekeeper: the vice president proves very helpful in my data collection. Initially, I could not have access to any documentation of the company files, no access to the electronic database of the customer profiles, no access to managerial meetings. During the course of my observation, I explain to her my practical difficulty of access in carrying out research in an effective and thorough manner; she and the GM give permission right away for full and immediate access to these written and electronic materials. They also give instruction in person to the head of the sales department again that full scale of support should be given to my research. My practical difficulty decreases a lot because of their help. To some extent, I think the sales managers' great help and support to me is heavily influenced by the vice president as well.

Regarding the organization, I am told by the professor when I am in contact with the company to establish access, that the company is a producer of natural food pigment and flavour. After I come to the field, initially I am told that the company is a joint-venture between Chinese capitals and foreign capitals; that the company is collaborating with a Japanese company to develop natural food flavour. Gradually, a

sales manager tells me that it is a trading company, and does not possess any capacity of production at all. The company is neither a joint-venture, nor a collaborator, with the internationally renowned Japanese food flavour production company. These are just lies to get more credibility by relating to a famous company and foreign capitals.

Another matter, which is not very related to my research questions, but which helps me to understand the participants and the organization from different perspectives, also confirmed my insider identity with the group through the sharing of the various gossips. There is a romantic gossip about a sales manager. Among the female colleagues, there is a widely spread gossip about him that he is flirtatious and has various mistresses and relationships with various women, though he is married with children. Almost all of the female colleagues have been approached by him secretly. Four female colleagues, of whom two are married and the other two have boyfriends at that time, acknowledged in front of me that he, who is also married at the time, has approached them.

#### **5.2.6 My Practice of Gift-giving for Guanxi Building:**

Guanxi requires the principle of reciprocity. Though I have already offered help to them in one way or the other, I prepare some gifts for them as well as a way to say 'thank you'. Before I go into the field, I purchase a few big boxes of Thorntons Chocolates, as the idea of chocolates is very English and they are actually produced in England. I also present a box of chocolates for the sales managers to share in the office. The chocolates and the thoughts behind it are very welcomed by the sales managers.

What I find interesting in my gift-giving practice relates to the reciprocity of the General Manager. I send chocolates, as a specialty from England where I study, to



him as a gift. He reciprocates in the same way: a box of specialty snacks from his hometown as well. Reciprocity between us is not only reciprocity: the gift and the thoughts are both reciprocated by him. The vice president does something similar, she reciprocates my gift with a gift of Chinese tea.

Reciprocity is not only conducted towards people, who help me a lot in my field work. It is also conducted towards the organization. At the end of the data collection, I give a presentation based on the data to the sales managers, the Vice President and the General Manager. The purpose of the presentation is not to give managerial advice based on research findings, since the data is not analyzed yet. Rather the presentation is given based on my reflections on the data collection period, which is aiming to give the sales managers something to reflect upon. As requested, I also give some proposals to the General Manager regarding the training session for the newly recruited sales managers, based on my own experience as a green hand.

During the data collection process, my gradual identity construction as insider and my Guanxi with the organization participants provide great help with my data collection. After this section on how I get the data, I will move on to give a detailed description of the collected data. This will include the introduction to the organization, the organization members, and the description of the data: participant observation data and interview data.

### **5.3 Data Collection:**

In this section, I will mainly describe what kind of data I get. This will include the introduction to the organization, the organization members, and the description of the data: participant observation data and interview data.

### 5.3.1 The Organization

The organization from which the data is collected will be referred to anonymously as AKL here. AKL is a Chinese trading company in the food additive industry, established in 1996.

The business in which AKL is involved is natural food flavour and colours. It mainly trades with its own Chinese suppliers and then sells the products to its Chinese industrial customers. However, it claims itself as a producer, rather than a trader, to gain more competitiveness. It also franchises a few foreign brands of natural food flavours and colours. For these types of product, AKL acknowledges itself as a franchisee. AKL also do exporting and importing business related to the raw materials for food flavours and colours.

AKL mainly targets the higher end of the Chinese customers who produce good quality and health-conscious products by using natural food additives; or customers whose end product is mainly for international markets and therefore are required to use natural food additives. AKL have been a long-standing key supplier of natural food flavours and colour for a few very big Chinese companies who are market leaders in different sub-divisions of the food industries. However, none of these companies know that AKL is a trading company.

AKL is a very small company, with seven different departments. The company structure is summarised as below:

<b>Departments</b>	<b>Number of people</b>
General Manager	1
Vice President	1
Department of Sales	7

Department of Exporting & Importing	2
Department of production	6
Department of Research and Development	3
Department of finance	2
Administration office	4

**Table 5 Structure of the organization for data collection**

Most of the time the General Manager is not around, in which case the Vice President is in charge of most of the business. The sales department is the most important one, engaged in developing new customers and, doing sales to current customers. A yearly quarterly sales target is allocated to the sales department. If the department fails to meet the target, there will be no year-end bonus for them. The research and development department, mainly helps solve problems encountered when the food additives are supplied into the customers' products. The production department mainly helps to repackage the trading goods into the AKL's label, and is sometime involved in preparing samples of the food additives for potential customers. The exporting and importing department is mainly involved in exporting raw food additive materials to the western developed countries. The finance department and the administration office help to maintain the functioning of the company.

My data collection is mainly in the department of sales. The sales practice of the company is region-based and person-specific. The Chinese market is divided into a few different geographical regions and each sales manager is allocated to be in charge of a few sub-regions. There are three managers who are regional heads. Only one of the regional heads (the head in charge of the Shanghai region) has subordinates at the

time of data collection, since the other two are about to recruit new members. Four sales managers are in charge of the Shanghai region, with one of them as the head and three of them as subordinates. One of the female subordinates is permanently based in the office in Shanghai. The other three only visit the Shanghai office every now and then. Both the headquarters of AKL and the branch office in Shanghai are visited during my data collection.

### 5.3.2 Organizational Members:

Since my data collection is mainly involved in the sales department, though I also interact with people across departments, I mainly introduce the sales managers who are the main participants in this study. There are seven managers in AKL, six of them are male and one of them is female. Their basic information is summarized in the following table. Some of their ages are not known and could only be suggested tentatively in the table below:

Name	Position	Gender	Age	Working experience
Shen	Head of the sales managers	Male	35	10 years of working experience in the sales industry. Joined AKL a few months ago as the head of sales department at the time of data collection.
Chen	Regional head: Shanghai region; Supervises Hua, Fu, and Zhu	Male	Mid 40s	Has been working for AKL since 1996. Prior to AKL, he has worked in the food additive industry for around 10 years. The most senior sales manager and the best performing

				manager in AKL.
Hu	Regional head;	Male	Mid 30s	Has been working for 10 years in the food additive industry. Working for AKL for 5 years. A senior manager and the second best performing manager in AKL
Zhen	Regional head;	Male	Early 30s	Initially working for 5 years for AKL in the research and development department; Joined the AKL sales department a year ago at the time of data collection. A senior manager and the third best performing manager in AKL
Fu	Sales manager; under supervision of Chen	Male	25	Two years of working in the car sales industry before joining AKL sales department. Joined AKL for one year.
Zhu	Sales manager; under supervision of Chen	Male	26	Three years of working experience as a lab engineer in one of AKL's customers companies. Joined AKL sales 6 months ago at the time of data collection. Boyfriend of Hua.
Hua	Sales manager; under supervision of Chen	Female	23	Just graduates from university. AKL is her first job, and has been working there for 9 months; Mainly based in Shanghai

				office; Girlfriend of Zhu.
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**Table 6 Basic information of the organizational participants in this study**

The major responsibility of these sales managers is to sell the trading products and, the franchised products to Chinese industrial customers. Maintaining current customers and developing new customers are two major specific aspects of their jobs. Associated with both of these two aspects are two main responsibilities: maintaining and strengthening good relationships with new and long-standing customers in order to do better sales. Since AKL is a trading company, the quality of the products are not such a major concern to them as the products are to those producing companies; relationships with their customers become the most important thing for them in their daily activities. For certain, their activities involve knowing the needs of their customers, knowing the food additive markets and, their competitors as well. However, all these activities around the product are for the sales and for the relationship building as well. Their most frequent daily activities therefore include: doing regular sales visits, telephone communication, msn chats, text messages with their customers; finding new customers either on line or through their customers and friends.

These are the activity types that they practice in the office during my data collection. My data is collected alongside the practice of these activities. The data therefore include a large chunk of participant observation data and interview data, which will be explained in the next section.

#### 5.4 Data Description:

The data mainly involves participant observation data and interview data. The data is collected in different settings and at different times throughout the data collection period. The data collection lasts for 7 weeks in August and September in 2008. The 7-week data collection could be summarized through the following table:

Week	Setting	Participants	Data collection
Week 1, 2 & 3	The office of the sales department in headquarters in AKL	All the sales managers, except Hua who is based in Shanghai	Participant observation of the office-interaction among the sales managers and their interaction with the customers over the phone; Informal interviews
Week 4	1-week sales visits, in 4 different cities	Zhen, the regional head of these cities	Participant observation of the interactions between the sales manager and the customers; Informal interviews on the issues occurring in the visits
Week 5	A 4-day business fair in Shanghai City, the branch office of AKL	Sales managers: Hua, Chen, and Hu. The exporting and importing managers.	Participant observation of the sales managers and their interaction with the potential customers at the fair; interviews about issues involved in their interaction;
Week 6	1-week sales visit in four different cities near Shanghai	Chen, the regional head of these cities; Hua, subordinate of Chen.	Participant observation of the interaction between Chen and Hua; also observation of Chen, Hua and their customers; Informal interview with Chen and Hua on issues involved in the sales visits
Week	The office of the	All the sales	Lengthy interviews with sales

7	sales department in headquarters in AKL	managers, except Hua who is based in Shanghai	managers upon issues occurring during the data collection and related to the research questions.
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**Table 7 Research Schedules for 7 weeks in the organization**

In the next section, I will present a more detailed description of these different types of data in different settings.

#### **5.4.1 Participant Observation Data:**

As shown in the above table, participant observation is used throughout the data collection period. The different settings and, different participants involved give a different shape to the participant observation data. Following the timeline of the above table, the participant observation data is featured according to the three different settings: office setting, sales visit setting and the business fair setting.

In the first office setting, participants are mainly involved in their daily routine activities as sales managers. The digital recorder is switched on almost all the time, recording almost everything they say in the work place. The data includes: their own interaction on a business level and on a personal level; their interaction with me in the office; their interaction with the customers through the phone. A lot of reflection data is collected: how the sales managers reflect upon their sales practice in front of me and in front of their colleagues.

In the second setting: the sales visit setting, data is shaped from another angle: how the sales managers actually practice sales in front of the customers and in front of me as well. This sales visit setting shows the sales practice from many different



perspectives depending on: different approaches that sales managers take; the different familiarities of the customers; the different purposes of the sales visit; the different industries the customers are in; the different products used by the customers. As shown above, the sales in AKL are divided into three different regions for sales. Customers are also divided into five different categories in their electronic customer data base, according to their business importance for AKL: key account; medium importance; and new customers. Sales visits could be regular and occasional. Some sales visits are regular and some are occasional for some specific events. For example before some important festivals, like the Chinese New Year, sales visits will be carried out. Sales visits could be for different purposes as well: some are about solving problems for customers; some are about strengthening the bonds between them; some are promoting new lines of products, though the ultimate intention is to build up Guanxi for more business cooperation. After spending three weeks in the office setting, I gain better knowledge about the sales practice in general and these subtle differences involved in the sales visits. At the time of my data collection, two trips are arranged in the 4<sup>th</sup> week and 6<sup>th</sup> week during stay, a business fair in the 5<sup>th</sup> week. I decide to join both trips. The two trips last for 7 days each and involve visiting 4 different cities in each region. The first trip is specially arranged for me, since the sales manager had just conducted a regular sales trip in my 2<sup>nd</sup> week of stay in the company. This trip is carefully planned by him, trying to fit with my research aim by visiting both new and long-standing customers in different industries. The second business trip in the 6<sup>th</sup> week is a regular and also an occasion-related visit in nature, since at that time it was the Chinese mid-autumn festival. This trip is in the most important region of AKL and carried out by the most senior manager. Both of the two trips involve staying in four different cities and meeting different customers. However,

the numbers of customers visited on each trip are different: on the first trip it is around 20 and on the second trip is considerably fewer (around 10). The customers are of different familiarities as well: some are totally new; some only met once or twice by the sales managers; and some are very long-standing customers and very familiar with them. These subtle differences in terms of the sales agenda, the sales manager and the customers provides me a chance to see how the sales manager engages in identity work in front of different customers with these various different contextual constraints.

Therefore, the participant observation data in this setting consists of: my description and commentaries of their natural conversation and interaction with their customers; their reflection and commentaries about each sales visit during the trip. Due to the research ethics issues, I did not record the conversations between the managers and the customers. I only take oral notes through a recording once I came away from the customers' company. This set of data provides me a chance to shape up the data in: how the sales managers really practice sales in a natural setting in front of their customers.

The third set of participant observation data is shaped from another context: a business fair in Shanghai. It is a four-day fair. The major activity is to search for new business opportunities, meeting new and potential customers in the fair. In the fair, I participate as an assistant, interpreter and translator for three sales managers. Data mainly consists of: their own interaction; their reflections about some potential customer they meet in the fair; and their discussion of the follow-up activities of these potential customers. Data is collected mainly in the light of how they attract new customers and how they present the brand of AKL in front of the customers with the purpose of building up possible business links and Guanxi with them.

The participant observation data also includes the documents in various forms and various natures: their sales reports to the company, their sales meeting minutes; their annual sales plans set up by the company; their sales training course materials by the company in video format; the books about sales strategies required by the company. These data are collected as part of the participant observation data, since these materials produced by the company frame the sales discourse.

These different contexts enrich the depth and breadth of my data set, focusing not only on in-office interaction, but also out-of-office interaction with their customers. During my participant observation in AKL, I also conduct informal interviews with them, either on a specific issue that I could not understand in their sales practice; or based on some of the issues that I find intriguing during my participant observation. I have informal interviews with them throughout my stay and most intensively in the last week, which I will talk about in the next section.

#### **5.4.2 Qualitative In-depth Interviews:**

A second type of data I collected is the qualitative in-depth interview data, which consists of two types. The first type is through interviews conducted during the first 6 weeks in AKL. They are conducted informally and loosely. The second type is through interviews conducted intensively in the 7<sup>th</sup> week in AKL. The second type of interviews is conducted after the researcher establishes an understanding about the field and wants to know more about specific issues.

The interviews are mainly conducted during my first 6 weeks in AKL. These interviews are mainly conversational in nature and conducted randomly, with a purpose to understand their organizational life in the sales department, as sales

managers and their sales practice with their customers. Therefore, the informal interviews consist of their own accounts of their sales practice in general; their job responsibilities; their job routines; their customers. A lot of examples are given by them in great detail in the conversations to illustrate their points. Informal conversation also includes specific sales practice on a daily basis. Since I project an image of a student researcher who wants to learn about the Chinese sales practice from those who are 'teachers' for me, most of the informal conversation between us on a daily basis concerns: their comments on some of the activities each day, which they think are important for a 'teacher to teach the students', and telling me why they are conducting certain activities; and how to conduct these activities for those specific situations. Informal conversation also involves my raising of daily confusions regarding some of the sales activities during the participant observations. The interviews are mainly to understand their sales manager's life in the natural setting, therefore they are all naturally occurring and spontaneous; no topics are initially arranged.

Apart from these interviews, some other interviews are arranged intensively in the 7<sup>th</sup> week. The timing allows a more relaxed atmosphere after establishing friendship with the sales managers in the previous 6 weeks. These interviews are conducted with the purpose of understanding how the sales managers identify with their customers in the milieu of Guanxi. The interviews are not structured, but also conversational in nature, open and exploratory. Compared with the interviews in the first 6 weeks, these interviews are conducted with a few important themes to discuss. These themes are from my prior knowledge of the Guanxi and identity literature and, the 6 weeks of experience in the company: this is very much based on the things and thoughts that occur to me as intriguing over this period in AKL. After the first round of interviews

with them, issues which appear as intriguing themes are further explored in a second round of follow-up interviews.

The first round of interviews, are mainly conducted based on a question: *how sales managers construct their identities in Guanxi with their customers?* This question is not raised to the customers directly. Instead, this question is being asked through a few other questions to avoid a very direct and simple answer from the customers. These different questions cover different themes of reciprocity, gift-giving, building up friendships and; building up Ganqing with the customers. The questions are framed using the manager's language which I observe in the past 6 weeks.

The interviews start with some factual and easy questions regarding their job responsibilities to establish a relaxing tone of the interview. If their description of their job responsibilities includes one or some of the themes, then I will then use their way of framing the theme and then ask them to tell me more about it. Most of the time, their talk will cover some of the themes and, I will ask them to further elaborate upon and give me an example. Therefore these themes are not raised in the same chronological order in my interview with them. They are more naturally brought in as naturally occurring. If they do not mention the themes, I will enact my questions, more or less in these phrases, in my conversations with them:

*Are you very familiar with any of the customers?*

*How do you get so familiar with your customers? How does that happen?*

*What do you do on festival occasions with your customers?*

*How do you help your customers?*

In narrating about their own experience regarding these questions, they talk very often with words like: *customers needs and customer wants; customer's interests, Ganqing with customers*. On the face of it, these words seem to be captured in the western consumer behaviour literature as the customer's needs, wants and interests regarding the products. However, in my conversation in the interview with them, these are understood in a totally different light. These words are originally from the western consumer behaviour theory, but they are adopted in this local context as: the emotional and financial needs of the customers on a personal level; the interests of the customer in terms of topic of conversation with them. Building up Guanxi with them, becoming good friends with them is about satisfying these needs, wants and interests on a personal level. The themes intended for discussion in the first round interview are closely associated with these themes that emerged in the first round interview as well.

Therefore, in the second round interviews, these themes are singled out and are further elaborated. These themes are illustrated by the sales managers with examples, situating the themes in certain specific contexts. These two rounds of formal interviews at the end of the study provide a chance to raise issues not only on the issues that I identify in the literature, but also provide a chance to deepen the understanding of the issues and themes which emerged throughout the data collection period.

### **5.5 Data Analysis:**

In this section, I will discuss how the data is being analyzed. Firstly, I will talk about how the data is being managed and organized. Secondly, I will talk about the transcription and translation of data. Finally, I will discuss in detail the two analytical strategies involved in the data analysis process.

### 5.5.1 Managing and Organizing the Data Set:

The data set consists of different types and volumes of data, summarized as below:

<b>Types of Data</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Digital recordings of participant observation, and interview data	Around 65 hours (in Chinese)
Videos of training materials for Sales managers	Around 20 hours (in Chinese)
Documents of the sales reports, important meeting minutes, emails and company profiles	Around 30 pages (in Chinese)
Selected Transcription and translation of the data	Around 200 pages.

**Table 8 Data description**

The digital recordings of the participant observation and interview data will serve as the primary source of data, the rest of them will serve as secondary data.

Since some of the audio data is irrelevant to my research, only some audio data is transcribed and translated into English. The data is transcribed and translated will be discussed further in the next section below. This reduced data set, together with the whole raw data set, is input into qualitative software: Atlas Ti 6.0, to help organize the data for easy retrieval.

These data are organized as: audio participant observation data; audio interview data; Chinese transcriptions; Chinese and English transcriptions of the data; and general documentary data. Within each organization, the data are input chronologically to establish a clear and straight timeline. Since the data is not collected with a set of very

structured and predetermined categories in mind, the organization of the data into a set of clear categories at the initial stage is not viable for this project. Therefore, with each organization, I further classify them by some broad divisions to clean up the data: by person (sales managers); by setting (office, trips, and business fair); and by event (e.g. gifting, corruption).

This initial organization of the data paves the way for a further level of data analysis. Throughout the data analysis, the data will be organized and reorganized alongside the deepening of the analysis, which will be addressed in the next section.

### **5.5.2 Data transcription and Translation**

The audio data of interviews are fully transcribed. As for the participant observation data, they are all listened to many times but only some sections are transcribed. These are the sections which are either directly relevant to the research question or indirectly linked as background information adding understandings of the context. In the participant observation data, there is some data, especially in the office setting, which is purely product-related and irrelevant to the research question. For example, their discussion about the detailed chemical process during the technical application of a product, or how to mix different food colours to generate a new colour. These data will be excluded from transcription.

The transcription is done in Chinese language first, since the data analysis is conducted upon the Chinese language. When a quotation is needed in the writing-up of the analysis, the section of the Chinese language data will be translated into English. Some of the quotations are directly translated into English. However, there is some data where the complexities of Chinese word meanings and culturally embedded



connotations of the Chinese idioms, sayings and set phrases will be lost after the translation process. In order to maintain the indigenusness of the Chinese language and avoid the loss of meaning of these sections of data, a three-way translation method which is usually used in the disciplines of linguistics in multilingual research will be adopted for these sections of data (Chiang and Duann 2007).

The three-way translations are: firstly, a word-for-word translations (henceforth: w-f-w T), secondly, a direct translation (henceforth: DT) and thirdly, an indirect translation (henceforth: IT). The three ways adopted from linguistics for the translations of the Chinese language maintains the transfer of meaning from one language to another language to some extent, though the loss of meaning is inevitable. Since some Chinese characters imply different connotations with its English equivalent, meanings of the important Chinese words will also be provided in English to capture the rich entailments contained in Chinese language. Therefore, the translation involves: provision of the word meanings of the important Chinese words (henceforth: WM); a word-for-word translation; a direct translation which captures the literal meanings; and an indirect translation which captures the intended meanings of the metaphors and phrases in Chinese. With this method, it is hoped that the meaning loss could be minimised and the richness of meanings in languages could be revealed.

### **5.5.3 Analytical Strategies:**

The analysis of the data takes an inductive approach, letting the themes emerge from the data. Taking metaphor analysis and narrative analysis as the analytical tools within the framework of CDA, the data analysis involves three different phrases, with

different emphasis at each phrase. These three phrases are not totally separated, rather they are interwoven and ‘inter-inspiring’.

### **5.5.3.1 Metaphor Analysis:**

In the first phrase, metaphor analysis is used to identify metaphoric identity constructions of the sales managers. This phase of analysis consists of the following steps:

1. Elicit the identity metaphors-in-use and the implied metaphors by these metaphors; organize them by person and event;
2. Elicit the collocating metaphors of the identity metaphors, organize them by person and event
3. Elicit the important collocating words with the identity metaphors, organize them by the co-occurring metaphors.
4. Analyze the identity metaphors by the level of emotionality involved, establishing two contradictory meta-categories of metaphors: emotional and emotionless metaphors
5. Analyze the two meta-categories by the reference: referring to customers or to sales managers
6. Analyze the two meta-categories by two meta-contexts: sales managers describing or interacting their interaction with customers, or sales managers reflecting on their interaction with customers

These steps will be further illustrated in detail here. Firstly, identity metaphors-in-used and metaphors implied through these identity metaphors are elicited from the data for

analysis. According to the shared characteristics, these metaphors are organized and coded into different root metaphors, e.g. family member metaphors, friend metaphors, animal metaphors. These metaphors are explored from two perspectives: who uses these metaphors and how are these metaphors used? Therefore, the authors of these metaphors and the local contexts in which they are used will be looked at. It involves coding these metaphors by persons and by local contexts.

To understand the identity metaphors better, a more thorough linguistic analysis is conducted in the second and third steps. This includes the linguistic analysis of the collocating metaphors; the collocating words; and adjectives with the identity metaphors both within the same, and neighbouring, sentences. This linguistic analysis at this micro-level provides a more vivid understanding of the identity metaphors. These collocating metaphors are also coded further by person, by events and by the identity metaphors they occur with.

From the first three steps of the analysis of the metaphors-in-use, the context, the use and collocating features of the metaphors at a local level are identified. This could be indicated through the different root metaphors and collocating metaphors established. The next few steps move the analysis to a more abstract level. In the fourth step, analysis of the identity root metaphors finds that they could be categorized into two contradictory meta-categories, based on the level of emotionality involved: emotional and emotionless metaphors, though there are just a few neutral emotional metaphors. Their collocating metaphors and words also show features of contradictory levels of emotionality.

In the fifth step, these two newly established contradictory meta-categories are further analyzed through the reference of the metaphors. It is found that sales managers are

referred to most of the time through emotional metaphors; while customers are referred to through both emotional and emotionless metaphors.

Since the local contexts could be summarized through two meta-contexts: sales managers' reflection on interaction with customers; sales managers' description and interaction with sales managers, in the sixth step, the two meta-categories of metaphors are further analyzed against these two contexts. In the reflection context, it is found that the emotionless metaphors and a few neutral emotion metaphors (e.g. doctor, patient) are used; while in the description contexts, the emotional metaphors are used.

From the metaphor analysis, different categories of metaphors are analyzed horizontally and vertically. At vertical level, metaphors are analyzed locally as metaphors-in-use and root metaphors, and at meta-level as two meta-categories. At the horizontal level, metaphors are analyzed in relation to contexts, authors of the metaphors, reference of the metaphors, collocating metaphors and collocating words.

In the next phase, a narrative analysis will be conducted, which will be discussed shortly.

#### **5.5.3.2 Narrative Analysis:**

After an intensive analysis of the metaphors-in-use at different levels, in the second phase, the analysis moves from 'what are the metaphoric identities?' to 'what do these metaphoric identities say or do in this specific socio-cultural context?' Therefore, metaphoric identities are seen as the dominant discursive identity constructions and narrative analysis is to further locate the identity metaphors into different discursive events and social contexts.

Inspired by a critical discursive analytic approach, the narrative analysis as an analytic tool, used in the second phase, also embraces the principles in CDA. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, CDA sees language use as an instance of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004). Also shown above, the identity metaphors show contradictory features. Therefore, analytically, a deconstruction approach for narrative analysis, which is guided by the principles of CDA will be used for the second phase of analysis. This phase include the following three steps, linking the analysis to the language use of metaphors at textual, discursive and social level.

1. At the textual level, identify the incidents and the relevant narratives and anti-narratives the metaphors are used within
2. At the discursive level, classify the incidents into four general discursive events or contexts and analyze how the dominant identity metaphors are used within each context
3. At the social practice level, analyze the discursive resources that these dominant identity constructions are drawn upon.

In the first step, the incidents where the metaphors are used are identified. Narratives and ante-narratives about the incidents are identified as well. The specific contradictory identity metaphors used in each of the incidents are also identified.

In the second step, these incidents are organized into four different discursive events. In these discursive events, it is found that different identity root metaphors are used as dominant metaphors for different events, though the same root metaphors might appear in more than one event. These contradictory root metaphors are organized

under each discursive event and further analyzed at a socio-cultural level in the third step.

In the third step, the root identity metaphors will be analysed within the socio-cultural contexts of these discursive events. Four pairs of contradictory culturally bounded discursive resources that these metaphors are drawn upon are found.

Through the narrative analysis, the discursive identities construction is analyzed mainly through the identity metaphors, but locating it in a more abstract context than the first phase of analysis: the socio-cultural context.

After the analysis of the data, the results are written up and presented in the following chapters.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter mainly serves as a bridge between the methodology chapter and the analysis chapter. It addresses specific and practical issues of what methods are used, how data is collected and analyzed. This chapter mainly consists of four sections: methods for data collection; the data collection process; the data description; and the data analysis process. For research methods, participant observation and interviews are both used. These two methods to some extent complement each other in that the things observed could be asked about in interviews, while things observed might not be mentioned in the interviews. Alongside the two methods, the researcher's role and its influence upon data collection is discussed in detail. This includes: how the researcher's role helps to secure access to the field; how it helps the collection of data with breadth and depth. For the data collection process, the organization and its

members are introduced first. Then the detailed data collection activities are summarized. The data collected through the two methods are also described in detail. For the data analysis section, I mainly talk about how I manage and organize the data and, how I transcribe and translate the data. Finally I talk about the inductive analytical strategies I take for this study. While doing so, I also discuss the two phases of analysis: metaphor analysis and narrative analysis in this study. The steps involved in each phase are clearly presented as well. The lengthy and detailed descriptions in this chapter pave the way for the next four sections of the presentation of the analysis.

## **Chapter 6 Data Analysis: Familism and Anti-Familism**

Through the data analysis, two discursively constructed identities emerged from the data set. These two identities are developed from the two meta-categories of identifications by the sales managers in the analysis. Due to the different levels of involvement of emotionality in these two identities, they are named here as: emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self. I use emotional relational self to refer to the identity that sales managers construct of themselves with a high emotion to relate to the customers in the meta-context of describing their interaction or actually interacting with the customers. Contrary to this term, the term instrumental anti-relational self refers to the identity, which sales managers construct of themselves as well, with high instrumentality and low emotion to dis-relate to their customer in the context of reflecting on their interactions with customers.

Drawing upon four contradictory pairs of discursive resources, the two contradictory meta-identities have four contradictory aspects of identities. For the emotional relational self, four aspects of self are constructed: familial; ethical, conforming and undirected reciprocal. Emotionality is constructed differently in these four aspects of identities. For the instrumental anti-relational self, four aspects of self are also constructed: anti-familial, unethical, adaptive and directed reciprocal. Instrumentality is featured differently in each of the aspects.

These aspects of identities, which are constructed contextually and emerged saliently within the four discursive events, are identified in the methods chapter, respectively. In the following four analysis chapters, I will discuss these four pairs of discursive resources and subsequent four pairs of aspects of identities, within four incidents chosen from the four discursive events.



The analysis of them will be organized in this way: the discursive resources of familism and anti-familism will be discussed in chapter 6; the discursive resources of ethics and anti-ethics will be discussed in chapter 7; the discursive resources of conformity and adaptability will be discussed in chapter 8; and, the undirected reciprocity and directed reciprocity will be discussed in chapter 9. Within each chapter, the aspects of constructed identities will be discussed as well.

In this chapter, I will discuss the first aspect of identities for both of the two meta-identities. They are: familial aspect of emotional relational self drawing upon the discursive resource of familism and the anti-familial aspect of instrumental anti-relational self drawing upon the discursive resource of anti-familism. The emotionality and instrumentality involved in these two aspects will be discussed contextually within an incident of festival gifting, but in two contexts: describing their interaction or actually interacting with the customers in this incident and reflecting upon their interaction with the customer in this incident.

The chapter will start with the explanation of the two discursive resources: familism and anti-familism. Then I will provide the background of this incident which is a traditional Chinese festival of family reunion: the mid-autumn festival. I will then move on to the analysis of the familial aspect of identities in the context of describing the interaction with customers in the incident. To do this, I will firstly look at how the familial aspect of identity is constructed through the use of certain identity metaphors; through the reconstruction of the relationships between the sales managers and the customers.

As the emotionality is a defining feature of the emotional relational self, the familial aspect of this self could be contextually captured through the construction of the

emotional attachments involved. Therefore, how emotional attachment is constructed in the familial aspect will be explored next. This exploration involves an initial analysis of the construction of emotional attachment in the general practice of gifting, and is followed by a contextualised construction of emotional attachment in this festival incident discussed in this chapter.

After this, I will turn my attention to the anti-familial aspect of instrumental anti-relational self in the context of their reflecting upon their interaction with their customers. To explore this aspect of identity, I also look at the identity metaphors used and the relationships constructed by the sales managers in the same incident of festival gifting. Since instrumentality is an important feature for instrumental anti-relational self, the construction of instrumentality will be explored here. To do this, I mainly look at how the idea of gift and gifting are perceived and reconstructed in the same incident by the sales managers.

After the systematic analysis of the two aspects of identities through identity metaphors, construction of relationships, construction of emotional attachment and instrumentality, I will summarise the analysis findings in the summary section.

## **6.1 Familism and Anti-familism**

The two aspects of identity draw upon two discursive resources: familism and anti-familism. As discussed in section 3.4.2, familism is considered as an important feature of Chinese society. The orientation to familism in Chinese relationships could be seen in the central importance given to the family relationships among all the social relationships (Yang 1995), and also in that other non-kinship but insider social relationships are patterned in terms of family relationships, for example two male

good friends will address each other as ‘brothers’. This familial orientation in relationships becomes a source of identification for the emotional relational self when sales managers describe their interaction or they actually interact with the customers. Drawing upon this discursive resource, a familial aspect of identity is constructed.

Anti-familism is used here to refer to the anti-familial orientation in social relationships. This feature is often shown among people who are non-kinship, outsiders to each other’s social circle and even strangers to each other and, have an instrumental purpose to interact. Relationships between them are therefore not patterned in terms of family relationships. For example, a person buys a bus ticket from the bus driver and both of them are not showing any familial orientations in framing their relationships. This anti-familism orientation among the outsiders, non-kinships and strangers also becomes a source of identification for the instrumental anti-relational self when sales managers reflect upon their interaction with the customers. Drawing upon this discursive resource, an anti-familial aspect of identity is constructed.

## **6.2 Background of the Gifting Incident: Mid-Autumn Festival**

Given the importance of gift-giving in Chinese culture in general and the building up and maintenance of Guanxi in particular, gifting is practiced very often in the Chinese business context. In the researched company, gifting is formally recognized as a compulsory business practice and as one of the responsibilities that sales managers need to fulfil in the company.

Gifting could be both ritualized and non-ritualized. Every year, the three most important traditional festivals in Chinese social life are officially recognized by the

company as occasions for ritualized gifting; the Chinese New Year; Dragon Boat Festival; and Mid-Autumn festival. The Mid-Autumn Festival happens to take place during the data collection period. Therefore this incident is chosen for the analysis of identity construction in the gifting practice.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most important traditional festivals in Chinese culture, symbolizing the family reunion. This festival originates from cosmology. The festival is always on 15<sup>th</sup> August every year in the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, since it is believed that the moon in the cosmos will reach its fullest shape on this specific date. The moon is often used in Chinese poetry to express ideas related to family reunion. A full moon symbolizes the reunion of all family members; a half moon indicates the non-completeness of the family members in the family reunion. A family get-together is often expected on this date. Another tradition is eating mooncake. Mooncake is a type of cake which is named after the festival and traditionally in the shape of a full moon. It is only available during the mid-autumn festival. Family members are supposed to give each other a box of mooncakes as gifts on this occasion.

These two traditions of the festival are practiced by the company as well. Every year, boxes of mooncakes are ordered by the company and each sales manager is provided with a certain number of boxes of mooncakes to give to the customers. Not every customer will receive the mooncakes, only important customers will receive them due to the limited number.

A few incidents happen around the gifting of the mooncakes in the company. Two different aspects of self emerged in the sales managers' identity construction in this socio-cultural context of Mid-Autumn Festival, bearing strong imprints of the

familism in Confucian culture. Sales managers draw upon discursive resources of familism to author their sense of self in their interaction with the customers. Contradictorily, sales managers draw upon anti-familism to author their self when they reflect upon their interaction with the customers. Here, both of the identities drawing upon two different discursive resources will be discussed.

### **6.3 Emotional Relational Self: Familism**

Sales managers draw upon the discursive resources of familism to construct their relational self when practicing gift-giving to their customers. This familial aspect of the emotional relational self will be explored through the construction of the metaphoric identities and the subsequent relationships between the sales manager and the customer; the constructions of the emotional attachment between them; and the construction of the gift.

#### **6.3.1 Metaphoric Identities and Relationship Construction**

In this festival, sales managers construct themselves and the customers through a series of family-oriented metaphors. Customers are constructed as ‘relatives, brothers, family members’ with the sales manager, which indicate kinship relationship; and as ‘good friends, companions’, which indicate friendship, summarized in the table below:

<b>Relationship construction</b>	<b>Identity of sales manger</b>	<b>Identity of customer</b>
<b>Kinship</b>	Relatives	Relatives
	Brothers	Brothers
	Family members	Family members
<b>Friendship</b>	Good friends	Good friends
	Companions	Companions

**Table 9 Relationship constructions, identity metaphors of sales managers and customers in festival gifting incident**

These different metaphoric identities reconstruct the customer relationships as the kinship and non-kinship relationships at the personal level, rather than a simplistic customer relationship at the business level. As discussed in section 3.4, these relationships belong to the five hierarchical relationships and familism is shown in the relationship constructions. Chinese relationships are characterised by their family-orientation, with the kinship relationships as the most fundamental ones for people's social relationships. Non-kinship is less important than the kinship circle, but both of them are within the inner circles of a personal social network.

In the festival, Chen mainly constructs his customers through kinship relationships, as shown in the following narrative

*Chen: sometimes he treat the customers as his **family members**, when the festival comes, go to his home to spend the festival, ... it is like a **family***

*Chen: I post this to him is because me and him are **like relatives, brothers, friends...** he does not lack the 100 yuan, and neither did he lack the box of mooncake,*

In this narrative, Chen talks about why he posts mooncake to some selective customers who are in a good relationship with him. Here, the customers are constructed as 'relatives, brothers, and friends' with him. The use of the kinship and non-kinship terms reflects the different strength of the relationships. According to Hwang (Hwang 1999), there are two different types of selves: *da wo* and *xiao wo*, which literally mean: big self and small self. The small self is family-oriented and most important for a person, and it is constructed through its relationships with its

kinship circles, the immediate family members. The big self is constructed through relationships with both kinship and non-kinship members in one's social network, with kinship as the most important and non-kinship as less important. In a familial Chinese society, many non-family relationships are patterned after the family system (King 1985) and friendship could be stated in terms of a brotherly relationship (King 1985, p.58). Interestingly, 'good friends' and 'brothers' are often used interchangeably to refer to the same customer in this family festival. The approximation of the relationship towards the five hierarchical relationships results in the approximation of the mutual obligations between the dyadic parties. Two different principles need to be observed here: *order* between brothers; and *mutual faith* between friends (Yum 1987).

### **6.3.2 Generalised Construction of Emotional Attachment: Ganqing**

As discussed in the Guanxi chapter, the strength of Ganqing marks the strength of Guanxi. Therefore, the familial aspect of the relational self is marked by a strong commitment of emotional attachment between each other. The construction of the emotional attachment is an indispensable part of the sales managers' identity construction. How emotional attachment is constructed in Guanxi practice in general and on festival occasions in particular will be discussed here to provide a vivid understanding of the emotional elements in the familial aspects of relational self.

The emotional attachment is relationship-specific. Different emotional attachment is bound up with different types of relationships. Though the emotional attachment is indicated through the family metaphors of 'relatives, brothers, family members', another metaphor pair is used by almost every sales manager in the company to describe specifically the emotional attachment engaged in the Guanxi building process.

This metaphor pair is: boyfriend-girlfriend metaphor. Sales managers are constructed as boyfriend and customers are constructed as girlfriend in the Guanxi building process. Through this metaphor pair, a romantic relationship is assumed. Collocating with them, a series of romantic metaphoric phrases are used to describe the construction of the emotional attachment in the Guanxi building process.

The emotional attachment is constructed as 'love' between 'lovers', as shown below:

*Fu: the process of chasing after a customer is like chasing after a girl. The whole process of sales is exactly the process like process of a guy chasing after a girl.*

*Chen: in the first encounter, it is love at the first sight, they have a lot of topics to talk about, if it is slowly-heating up types, meeting up, getting to know each other, then you need to communicate more...*

In the above narratives, the Guanxi building process is metaphorized as the courting process between lovers. The Guanxi practice is reconstructed as the courting practice and consequently the sales managers and customers are reconstructed as 'lovers' in the courting practices. The speed of the courting process is indicated through the romantic phrases 'love at the first sight' and 'slowly-heating up type'. For the customers belonging to the 'love at the first sight type', Guanxi could be established in the first place. For the 'slowly-heating up type', Guanxi establishment takes a longer courting time. The business activities are phrased as the courting activities for lovers: 'meeting up, getting to know each other.'

The emotional attachment is further constructed through the use of 'xin' (heart and mind).

*Shen: it is more appropriate to call it Customer Sentiment Relationship, rather than customer relationship, because customer relationship is to maintain the relationship*



*with customers, while customer sentiment relationship is to keep the Xin (heart and mind) of the customers.*

In the above narrative, customer relationship is rephrased as customer sentiment relationship by the head of the sales department: Shen. Sentiments or emotional attachment with the customers is emphasized. The emotional attachment is further illustrated through the use of *xin*. To manage the emotional attachment is to ‘keep the *xin* of the customers’, rather than only the relationships. *Xin* is a Chinese character, which is usually translated as heart in English. However, *xin* in Chinese means ‘heart, mind, feeling and intention’. While keeping the relationships with the customers indicates a cultivation of relationships at a relatively superficial level, keeping the *xin* of the customers means the cultivation of the feelings with each other, just like the process of courting of lovers.

Apart from the courting metaphor of ‘boyfriend and girlfriend’ which is used to symbolize the Guanxi building process, ‘friend’ metaphor is also often used to symbolize the episodes of actual interaction with the customers within this process. Collocating with the metaphor of friendship, the Chinese character *xin* is used to construct the emotional attachments in this ‘customer sentiment relationship’. In the following two narratives, *xin* is used to symbolize the attitudes of the sales managers and the customers:

*光：你的心态就是一个朋友，你要以这样的心态来去跟别人交流，*

*W-f-w T: your- heart- attitude- is- a-friend, you- need to -use-such an-heart attitude (Xin Tai) -to-with others-communicate.*

*WM: Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart: mind: feeling: intention; 3. Center; 4.the fifth of the twenty-eight constellation into which the celestial sphere was divided in ancient Chinese astronomy (consisting of three stars in Scorpio).*

*Tai: 1. form, appearance, condition 2. state 3. voice*

*DT: your heart attitude is to be a friend, you need to take such an attitude to communicate with others.*

*IT: your attitude from the bottom of your heart is to be a friend, you need to adopt such an attitude to communicate.*

Here, *xin* is used in conjunction with the Chinese character ‘*tai*’. ‘*Tai*’ in this narrative means: ‘state’. Combining the meanings of each of the two, ‘*xin tai*’ means the ‘state’ of the ‘heart, mind, feeling, intentions’. Therefore, interacting with the customer needs, the ‘state of the mind, feelings, intentions’ of the sales managers needs to be a friendship-like state of mind.

This friendship state of mind needs to be mutual. Both the sales managers and the customers could be in the same friendship-like state of mind, as shown in the next narrative:

*朱: 跟客户沟通还是要保持微笑, 态度决定一切, 客户也是人嘛, 将心比心嘛,*

*W-f-w T: with-customer-communication-still-need-maintain-smile, Tai Du-decides-everything, customer-too-is-human, compare-our heart-with-others heart.*

*WM: compare-our heart-with-others heart: put oneself in sb's shoes: think of others. be empathic*

*DT: Zhu: communicating with customers, attitude decides everything, the customers are human being as well, need to compare our heart to hearts.*

*IT: Zhu: communicating with customers, attitude decides everything, the customers are human being as well, need to put ourselves into others situation and be empathic towards others.*

In this narrative, when sales manager Zhu talks about how to manage a ‘customer sentiment relationship’, attitude and *xin* are used again. Attitude is indicated through

another word combination: *tai du*. As discussed above, *tai* means ‘state’ and ‘*du*’ means ‘degree’. Here ‘*tai du*’ differs a bit from the above phrase ‘*xin tai*’. Though often used as a set phrase to mean ‘attitude’, ‘*tai du*’ means more about the strength of the emotional attachment through the word ‘*du*’. In this case, ‘*tai du*’ could mean ‘the degree of the state’ of emotions. While in the phrase of ‘*xin tai*’, the ‘state’ of mind is maximized to the greatest degree with the use of ‘*xin*’: ‘the state of the mind: ‘feelings’. In this narrative, attitude is being indicated by ‘*tai du*’, suggesting that the degree of emotional attachment is not settled, but open to negotiation. Therefore, ‘compare your *xin* with others’ *xin*’ is used here to indicate the degree of emotions involved. The verb ‘compare’ indicates the balance of the degree of emotional attachment between the two parties involved. The use of ‘*xin*’ suggests the maximum emotional engagements from both of the parties. That is, one’s ‘heart, mind, intention, feelings’ could be compared to that of others to achieve a similar ‘degree of state’ (*tai du*) of emotions.

Apart from constructing the degree of emotional attachment between each other, the process of emotional attachment construction is also indicated through a few phrases of *xin*:

光：只要你把心放开，

*w-f-w T: as long as -need-you-to-Xin-open*

*WM: Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention; 3. Center; 4.the fifth of the twenty-eight constellation into which the celestial sphere was divided in ancient Chinese astronomy (consisting of three stars in Scorpio).*

*DT: as long as you open up your heart*

*IT: as long as you open up your heart*

In this narrative, *xin* is metaphorized as a closed physical space for ‘mind, intentions and feelings’. To cultivate the emotional attachment with the customers, one needs to open the space.

After opening the space of ‘*xin*’, both parties get to know more about each other to gain recognition from the heart of each other, as shown below:

光: 你要让客户认可, 很知心, 就是像一个朋友一样

*Chen: you need to make the customer recognize you, knowing the hearts (Zhi Xin: knowing very deeply and very well), just like a friend.*

*w-f-w T: you-must-let-customer-recognize, very-much-knowing-the-heart (Zhi Xin), is-like-a-friend.*

*WM: Zhi Xin: intimate, understanding*

*Zhi: 1.know, realize, be aware of, 2. inform, notify, tell 3. knowledge 4 administer, be in charge of*

*Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention; 3. Center; 4.the fifth of the twenty-eight constellation into which the celestial sphere was divided in ancient Chinese astronomy (consisting of three stars in Scorpio).*

*DT: you must let the customer recognize you, knowing each other's heart very well, just like an intimate friend.*

*IT: you must let the customer recognize you in their heart, and you need to know each other's thoughts from the bottom of your heart, just like an intimate friend.*

In this narrative, *xin* is used here to signify the credibility. Two verbs are equated as similar: ‘recognize’ and ‘know’. The sales managers’ being recognized by the customers as credible is equated to ‘knowing the *xin*’ of the customers. Recognition of the product on the business level is achieved through the ‘knowing of the mind, heart,

feeling and intentions' of the customer on a personal level. The phrase 'just like friend' further affirms the equivalence of the two different processes.

At the same time, the strength of the emotional attachment in friendship is indicated through the following narrative:

**陈: 和他交心, 交朋友**

*w-f-w T: to-him-exchange heart (Jiao Xin), make friends*

*WM: Jiao Xin: lay one's heart bare, open one's heart to*

*Jiao: : 1. hand over, give up, deliver 2. (of places or periods of time) meet, join 3. reach (a certain hour or season) 4. cross, intersect 5. associate with 6. friend, acquaintance, friendship, relationship 7. have sexual intercourse 8. mate, breed 9. mutual, reciprocal, each other 10. together, simultaneous 11. business transaction, deal, bargain 12. fall*

*DT: Chen: to exchange hearts with him, to make friends,*

*IT: Chen: to open your heart to him. To make friends with him*

Making friends is metaphorized as 'exchanging the *xin*', i.e. 'exchanging the heart, mind, intention, feelings' between the sales managers and the customers.

From the above analysis of the generalized construction of the emotional attachment between sales managers and the customers, it is found that the generalised emotional attachment is constructed, to a large extent, through the use of the character 'xin', which means both 'heart and mind' in English. The use of 'xin' in different Chinese phrases constructs emotional attachments in different aspects. The attitudes of the sales managers and customers are indicated through the phrases of: 'the attitudes of *xin*'; 'comparing your *xin* with other's *xin*'; 'opening one's *xin*'. The strength of the emotional attachment is indicated through the phrases of 'knowing one's *xin*';

‘exchange the *xin* with each other’. These different phrases of *xin* that are used to construct the generalised emotional attachment between the sales manager and the customers.

In the remaining sections, attention will be shifted from the general construction to a more localized construction of emotional attachment, that is, the emotional attachment between the sales managers and the customer in this specific family-oriented festival. The emotional attachment is a contextual discursive construct. It is in line with the context it is located within. Therefore, in this family reunion festival occasion, the local construction of emotional attachments bears strong imprint of the general constructions, and is also influenced by the immediate context of familism.

### **6.3.3 Mooncakes: Contextualised Construction of Emotional Attachment**

In this gifting incident, the discursive construction of emotional attachment is achieved through the reconstruction of gift ritualistically and emotionally. In the festival gifting incident, giving mooncakes is recontextualized and reconstructed as a ritualized practice among family members, rather than among business partners. Gift is constructed as a ‘greeting’ for customers, as the following narrative shows:

*Chen: It is time for the festival; I send you a box of mooncakes as a **seasonal greeting**.*

*Hu: It does not matter how many words you say, what counts is you send him **the greetings at such a special occasion**.*

The material aspect of gift is muted, but the symbolic and ritualized aspect of gifting is foregrounded through reframing it as a ‘seasonal greeting’ for ‘relatives, brothers and friends’ on ‘special occasions’. Gifting is therefore reconstructed as a familial practice with family-oriented rituals.

The symbolic aspect of gift is further constructed as propriety shown by the sales managers towards the customers, as the following narrative shows:

*Chen: 'he could not think in term of how much money the mooncake worth' (Chen).*

*Hu: 'No one lacks this 10 pounds of mooncakes, ...it is just Li (propriety)'*

As mentioned above in the Guanxi chapter, gift, in Chinese: *liwu*, consists of two Chinese characters: *li* (propriety) and *wu* (thing). A *wu* (thing) without *li* (propriety) is just a *wu* (thing), only with *li* (propriety), a *wu* (thing) is a gift (*liwu*). Here, the material aspect of the gift in the narratives is explicitly denied. The symbolic aspect of gifting practice is further realized through one of the most important virtues of the Confucian concept of man: *li*: propriety. The reconstruction of gift as symbolic and ritualistic implicitly constructs the family-like emotional closeness between the sales managers and the customers.

The emotional attachment is also shown through the reconstruction of the gift emotionally. A Chinese character is often used for this emotional construction of gifting: *xin*, which is usually translated as heart in English. However, its connotations are far beyond this meaning in the English language. *xin* consists of four meanings in the Chinese language based in the Chinese-English dictionary (Wu 1979), which is: 'the heart; mind; feeling; intention'.

In Chinese, *xin* could be combined with other Chinese characters, and therefore express different context-dependent meanings. In the gifting incident, *xin* was used in combination with other words and formed different word phrases in Chinese: *xin yi*; *xin ling*; *xin xiong*; and *xin dao*. These word phrases co-occur with the metaphoric identities of 'relatives, brother, family member and friends' in the same narrative,

further intensifying the construction of emotional closeness, and will be looked at one by one here.

Gift is often referred to as '*xin yi*' by the sales manager, giving a gift is equated to 'giving *xin yi*' to the customers, as the following narrative shows:

*Hu: 让他知道一份小小的心意, 知道你经常在我心中。*

*W-f-w T: -let-him-know-a-small-Xin-Yi, knowing-that-you-are-often-in-my-Xin-Zhong.*

*WM (word meaning, hereafter: WM):*

*Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention*

*Yi: 1. meaning, idea 2. wish, desire, intention 3. anticipate, expect 4. suggestion, hint, trace*

*Xin Zhong: in the heart, in the mind*

*Xin Yi: 1. Regard, kindly feelings, 2. intention purpose*

*DT: it is to let him know a small regard, knowing that you are always in my heart.*

*IT: it is to let him know a small regard from my heart, to let him know that you are always in my heart.*

As mentioned above, *xin* means 'the heart, mind, feelings and intentions', and *yi* means 'wish, desire, intention', the combination of the two are 'regard, kindly feeling' from the 'mind' of the sales managers. In the narrative above, Hu talks about giving mooncakes to his brotherly customers in the festival. By framing gift as *xin yi*, the gifting practice moves beyond the ritualistic aspect of *li* (propriety) and the emotional attachment is constructed within a gift. In this case, the use of *xin yi* intensifies the kinship emotional closeness between the sales managers and the customers as heartfelt wishes.

The construction of emotional attachment could be realized not only through the actual gifts, but also without the presence of gift, as the following narrative shows:



Chen: 过来这边问候你, 虽然我月饼是没带, 但是我带着心意来,

w-f-w: come-here-greet-you, though-I-mooncake-is-not-bring, but-I-bring-Xin-Yi.

Yi: 1.meaning, idea 2. wish, desire, intention 3.anticipate, expect 4. suggestion, hint, trace

DT: coming here to greet you, although I did not bring the mooncakes, I bring my Xin Yi

ID: I come here to give you my greetings, although I did not bring mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn Festival, I bring my Xin Yi with me.

In this festival event, Chen is on a business trip, visiting one of his customers just right before the festival, and his construction of the kinship emotions is without the presence of gift. However, interestingly, unlike the previous narrative in which *xin yi* overlaps with gifts, gift and *xin yi* are separated here. Through acknowledging the disappearance of gift, the appearance of *xin yi* is emphasized here.

Without actual gifts, *xin yi* could also be communicated and reach the customer, as shown below:

Chen: 那我就发个短信, 那他知道我心到

w-f-w: then-I-send-a-short-message, then-he-know-my-heart-arrives.

WM: Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention

Dao: arrive

DT: then I send a text message, he will know that my heart arrives

IT: then I send a text message, he will know that it is greetings from my heart.

In this narrative, Chen sends his greeting to his customers via text message. The emotional closeness is indicated through another word combination of *xin*: *xin dao*. *Dao* is a verb in Chinese which, means ‘arrives’. The emotional closeness is constructed through an immaterial form: text message. The emotion is constructed

through the phrasing of the customer's receiving message text as 'the arrival of the sales managers' heart, mind, feelings and intentions', rather than the arrival of only a greeting, as Chen later further comments: '*I need to express my heart*'.

The degree of emotional attachment is further constructed through the word phrase of: *xin zhong*, as the following narrative shows:

胡：一盒月饼多少钱，别人也不在乎你那月饼，为什么要寄，就让他知道，就让他知道一份小小的心意，知道你经常在我心中嘛

*Hu: How much does the mooncake cost, he does not care your mooncakes, why do we need to post it.*

*w-f-w T: it-is-to- let-him-know-a-small-regard (Xin Yi), knowing-that-you-are-always-in-my-heart*

*WM: Xin Zhong: in the heart, in the mind*

*Xin Yi: 1. Regard, kindly feelings, 2. intention purpose*

*DT: it is to let him know a small regard, knowing that you are always in my heart.*

*IT: it is to let him know a small regard from my heart, to let him know that you are always in my heart.*

Zhong means: 'middle'. The phrase: *xin zhong*, means: 'in the middle of the heart'. In this narrative, though 'xin' means 'mind, feelings and intentions', *xin* is used in the sense of the physical 'heart'. To visualize the mind, feeling and intentions physically like the 'heart', *zhong* which means 'middle' indicates the place or position of the customers in the 'heart'. Confucian culture places a lot of importance on the hierarchy and order between different people. Middle position entails importance and prestige. Therefore, *xin zhong* which means 'obtaining a middle position in the heart of feelings' shows the importance of the customers to the sales managers.

The emotional attachment is constructed and expressed with and without the presence of gift. When *xin yi* is embedded in the material gift, the acceptance of the gift signifies the acceptance of the *xin yi*. However, *xin yi* could be accepted when declining the gift, as shown in the following narratives of a customer:

他说：月饼，不要寄啦，不要寄啦，月饼很多啦，我知道啦，这个心我领了。

w-f-w: he said: mooncakes, do-not-post, do-not-post, mooncakes-very-many, I know, this-heart-I-accept.

WM: *Xin*: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention; *Ling*: accept

DT: he said: mooncakes, don't post, don't post. A lot of mooncakes, I know and I accept your heart.

ID: he said: mooncakes, please don't post it to me, please don't post it to me. I got too many boxes of them. I know, I appreciate the kindness but have to decline the offer.

In this narrative, sales manager Chen wants to post the mooncakes to a customer and asks for a proper address to send the gift over the phone, since acceptance of gifts is not allowed in the customer company. Here, the customer declines the offer of physical gift: mooncakes, but accepts the *xin yi* through the use of the word phrases *xin ling*. *Ling* here means: accepts. Therefore, the wish from the heart is also accepted by the customers in the heart.

Apart from the use of *xin* in the construction of kinship emotions, the familial aspect of the emotional relational self is also constructed through the use of the Chinese word: *qing*, which literally means emotions. The ritualized gifting practice is commented on by Hu as an expression of emotions, as the following narrative shows:

Hu: 送一些给客户，以表感谢之情，

w-f-w T: send-some-to-customer, to-express-thanks (Gan Xie)-of-feeling(Qing)

WM:

Gan: 1. Feel, sense 2 move touch, affect 3. Be grateful, be obliged 4. Chinese medicine: be affected 5. Sense, feeling 6. Photo g: sensitive

Xie: 1.thank 2.make an apology, excuse oneself 3..decline 4. (of flowers, leaves) wither

Gan Xie: thank, be grateful

Qing: 1. feeling, affection, sentiment 2. Love, 3. Passion

DT: then we send some to the customers, to express our feelings of thanks

IT: then we send boxes of mooncakes to some customers, to express our feelings of thankfulness to them.

*Qing*, in Chinese means: ‘feeling, affection, sentiment; love; and passion’. For the narrative above, the gift is constructed as a means to express the *qing* of ‘thankfulness’ to the customers. This emotion of affection and feelings to the customers alludes to the affection between family members.

In this gifting incident, the familial aspect of emotional relational self is constructed through the construction of gift and family-like emotional attachments with each other. However, within the same narratives around this festival incident, an instrumental anti-relational self is also constructed, drawing upon a contradictory discursive resource: anti-familism, which will be discussed in the next section. Firstly, I will look at the generalised construction of the instrumental anti-relational self in gifting practice. Then I will move on to the localised construction of the instrumental anti-relational self in this Mid-Autumn Festival gifting incident.

#### 6.4 Instrumental Anti-relational self: Anti-familism

While drawing upon familism to construct a relational self in the ritualized gifting incident, an anti-relational self is also constructed drawing upon anti-familism when the managers reflect upon their gifting practices. Opposite to the familial aspect of the emotional relational self, the anti-relational self is characterised by emotionlessness and instrumentality. In the generalized construction of identity in general gifting practice, the anti-familial aspects of identities; the relationships between them; and the emotionlessness and instrumentality between them will be explored. Then, I will look at the identity constructions in the localised festival gifting incident. Specifically, I will look at the localised identification; the constructions of relationships; the construction of gifts in this festival incident, and the emotionlessness between the sales managers and the customers.

In the construction of instrumental anti-relational self in the mooncake-gifting incident, the discursive resource of anti-familism is drawn upon for identity construction. Contrary to the customer sentiment relationship in the above section, a professional term: 'customer relationship management' is used in the sales manager's narrative. The business-oriented nature of the customer relationship is further emphasized through the metaphor of 'spy', as shown in the following narrative:

*Shen: If there is a good customer sentiment relationship with a customer, then the customer is like a spy in the customer company for you. Whenever there is some new information, you will get informed.*

In this narrative, customer sentiment relationship is reconstructed as a contractual relationship. The customer is constructed as 'spy' and the sales manager is implicitly constructed as 'head of the intelligence'. Customers are working in the customer

company, but for the sake of the sales company. The if-conditional here signifies the consequential relationship between the construction of the customer sentiment relationship and the construction of the customer as ‘spy’.

The relationship with the customers is further intensified as a fighting relationship, as shown in the following narrative:

*Zhu: actually the process is long...for some customers; relationship building is like a protracted war.*

In this narrative, Zhu uses the metaphor of ‘protracted war’ to symbolize the prolonged process of building up relationship with the customers. This metaphor is in sharp contrast with the courting metaphor in the construction of relational self. This metaphor also assumes the identities of the sales managers and the customers as ‘enemies’ in the war.

Collocating with the ‘war’ and ‘spy’ metaphor, *xin* is used to construct emotionlessness in these contractual and fighting relationships, as Shen comments:

*Shen: What is the purpose of doing customer relationship management? It is for the customer market. But where is the market? How big is the market? ....The market is in the ‘xin’ of the customers. It is as big as the human fist. Everyone’s ‘xin’ is as big as his fist. It is how you conquer the ‘Xin’ of the customers, the more room you get in his ‘xin’, the bigger market share you have...*

In the above narrative, customer relationship is phrased as ‘customer relationship management’. Collocating with this professional construction of relationship with customers, three other professional terms are also used: ‘customer market’ ‘market size’ and ‘market share’, to reconstruct the emotional attachments. The sales managers’ relationships with the customers are narrated from an emotionless business

perspective. Interestingly, *xin* is also used metaphorically by the narrator to construct 'customer market' 'market size' and 'market share'. *Xin* (heart, mind, intention, feelings) is phrased as the 'customer market'. The size of *xin* in the physical sense is phrased as the 'market size'. Constructing emotional attachment in the *xin* of the customers is phrased as getting 'market share'. The stronger the emotional attachment, the bigger the market share is in the market. The construction of the emotional attachment is reinterpreted through the perspective of instrumentality.

This reconstruction of the general practice of relationship building as instrumental provides a meta-context for the localized construction of the relationships in this ritualized gifting incident. In line with the meta-metaphor of *guanxi* building as 'war', two other metaphors are used and also hold the same conflictual assumptions about the sales managers and the customers.

In this festival gifting, two important metaphors are in use: 'investment' and 'bullet'. These two metaphors are used for the construction of gift in this context. Relationships and identities of the sales managers and the customers are reconstructed implicitly around these two dominant metaphors.

The metaphor of 'investment' assumes a contractual relationship with the customers and the sales managers. Sales manager is metaphorized as a person: 'financial investor' and the customer is an inanimate object: 'financial product' which invites investments from the investors. Different from the family-featured discourse in the above section, instrumentality and profitability characterize the identity metaphors. The gift and the emotional attachment of the sales managers enacted within the gift, are seen as 'investment' towards the emotional attachments of the customers, as Chen's narrative shows below:

Chen: 在人的情感方面要做很多的投资, 在人情的方面要做很多的投资, 这样的客户关系会很长久, 。

W-f-W: *in-human's-Qing-Gan-aspect-need-do-very-many-investment, in-human-Qing-aspects-do-very-many-investment, then-customer-Guanxi-will-very-long*

WM:

Gan: 1. Feel, sense 2move touch, affect 3. Be grateful, be obliged 4. Chinese medicine: be affected 5. Sense, feeling 6. Photoe: sensitive

Qing: 1. feeling, affection, sentiment 2. Love, 3. Passion

DT: *need to do a lot of investment in human's sense and feeling, need to do a lot of investment on human's feelings. Then the customer relationship will be very long.*

ID: *(we) need to do a lot of investment in the customer's feelings and sentiment, need to do a lot of investment on the favours and reciprocity. Then the relationship with the customers will last for a long time.*

In this narrative, Chen talks about his giving mooncakes to the customer in the festival as 'investment in emotions'. Two Chinese characters are used for emotional attachments: *qing* and *gan*. Both of them mean: 'feeling' and 'affection'. Gift is reconstructed as 'investment' on the *qing* and *gan* of the customers. Gift as investment takes many different forms, as Chen's comments indicate: *'time you spent...the energy you spent, the things you did for him, all these are investments, human labour, time, material, all these are investments,...why sending mooncakes? It is a material investment'*. Apart from the material aspect of the gift as 'investment', there is an aspect of emotionality involved in the gift. Therefore, gift as 'investment' from the sales managers expects returns from the customer not only materially, but also emotionally. Contrary to the construction of relational self where the construction of emotional attachment is viewed as an external representation of the inner feeling of



*xin* (heart and mind), emotional attachment is viewed as an inaccurate representation of the inner feelings of *xin*. As Kipnis (2002) points out, the feelings or *ganqing* in Guanxi do not have to be accurate representations of the inner feelings and *ganqing* is used as a tool to cultivate good Guanxi.

This inaccurate and instrumental representation of feelings is also revealed through a few other *xin* related phrases used by the sales managers.

*Xin* is used in the following narrative to indicate the emotional distance between the sales managers and the customers:

申：第一次见面，双方有戒心的

*w-f-w T:: the first time-meeting, both parties-have- on guard- their heart.*

*WM: Jie Xin: vigilance, wariness*

*Jie: 1.guard against 2. exhort, admonish, warn 3. give up, drop, stop, 4. Buddhist monastic discipline, 5. (finger) ring*

*Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart: mind: feeling: intention: 3. Centre; 4. the fifth of the twenty-eight constellations into which the celestial sphere was divided in ancient Chinese astronomy (consisting of three stars in Scorpio).*

*DT: in the first meeting, both hearts are on guard*

*IT: in the first encounter, both parties are in a defensive status against the other.*

In opposition to the many phrases where *xin* is used to indicate emotional attachment in relational self, *xin* is used here in conjunction with other words to indicate the emotional distance. In the relational self, *xin* is used with *zhong*. In this combination, *Xin* is used in the sense of physical heart where the ‘mind, intention, feelings’ of the sales managers locates. This physical heart is metaphorized as a space where people could enter and *zhong* indicates the position of the customers in this space. Similar to

this metaphorization of *xin* as a physical space, *xin* here is used with *jie*, which means ‘guard against’. Therefore, *jie xin* means ‘the heart, mind, feelings, intentions’ are on guard and could not be entered easily. The customer could not enter into the middle of the *xin* of the sales managers, which is also confirmed in the following narrative:

*Shen: no matter how brotherly with the customers on the face, the distance between the hearts is still never going to be shortened.....Because standing between you and the customers, it is profits. Because of the profits, it is impossible to become friends with customers.*

In the above narrative, *xin* is metaphorized as a space. However, the two hearts are not only on guard, but also distant from each other. The emotional distance is metaphorized as the physical distance between the two spaces. Friendship between them is explicitly denied as well.

Another metaphor also used predominantly in the localized construction of the anti-relational self is ‘bullet’. For this metaphor, a conflictual and fighting relationship is assumed with customers; customers and sales managers are constructed as enemies to each other, as shown in Zhu’s narrative:

*Zhu: 逢年过节给他送点小礼物, 就是糖衣炮弹*

*w-f-w: every-year-festival-give-him-send-little-gifts, it-is-sugar-coat-cannon-bullet*

*DT: every year, every festival, need to give him some small gifts, it is like sugar-coated bullet*

*ID: every year it is necessary to give some small gifts in the festival occasions, the gifts are as powerful as the cannon and bullet.*

In the above narratives, the gift is metaphorically constructed as bullet or cannon with sugar plated on the outside. A bullet is harmful and could cause a fatal result, but the

bullet is coated with sugar and the harm is therefore concealed by the sweetness of the sugar. Sugar-coated bullet is a set metaphoric phrase in Chinese language, often used to refer to employing a seemingly soft approach with a harmful intention for problem solving. This soft approach is viewed as harmless at the surface, but fatal underneath. The use of the phrase presupposes the oppositions between the sales manager and the customers.

Gift has been employed as a business strategy for profitable returns. The instrumental nature of gift is emphasized. Fu's incident of gifting could be a case for illustration. Sales manager Fu has been in touch with a customer for a while, but gets stuck in the middle of the process of the product test. The customer shows great indifference towards Fu. Fu decides to send him a box of mooncakes during this festival. An immediate effect of the mooncakes is shown. The customer returns the favour immediately by providing more information about the product test. With the help of the customer, the product goes through the product test process very quickly. According to Fu, the mooncake is a quick and easy solution for difficulties of this type, as shown in the Chinese phrases:

*Fu: 四两拨千斤,*

*w-f-w T: it-is-four 50gram (Liang)-lift up-thousand ½ kilo gram (Jin).*

*WM: Liang: unit of weight (=50 gram).*

*Jin: a unit of weight(=1/2 kilogram).*

*DT: it could lift the thousand kilogram via only four 50gram objects.*

*IT: it solves problems which would otherwise require lots of money.*

In this phrase, the units of weight: *liang* and *jin* are two measurements of weight in ancient China. *Jin* is a bigger measurement than *liang* and one *jin* consists of 12 *liang*. In ancient times, this phrase originally refers to a martial arts technique for a fighter.

This fighting technique is often used to describe how a fighter manages to beat his much stronger rival with much less strength. As shown in this phrase, four *liang* indicates much less strength and thousands of *jin* a much bigger strength. Objects weighing thousands of *jin* could be lifted up through four *liang*. In modern times, this is used to refer to a person's wisdom in handling difficult situations by a simple solution. The use of this phrase metaphorizes Fu as a weaker fighter and the customers as a stronger rival. The customer has the strength of thousands of *jin*, but the sales manager manages to win the fight with little strength through the mooncakes. Gifting practice is constructed as an instrumental and emotionless practice. The instrumentality of the anti-relational self is also constructed through the type of gift given, as shown below:

*Chen: The cigarette is not something you like, but his Xin still got some feelings, that is to say, you think about him, of course, the feeling of the customers will be discounted,*

Here, Chen talks about an incident of giving a wrong gift to the customer. The emotional attachment represented through the gift is quantified and viewed as countable and something that could be sold: 'discounted'. Even customers as gift-receivers are selected from the perspective of 'worth', as Hu comments:

*Hu: 'for those customers, who are likely to buy from us...they are the VIP receivers of the mooncakes....usually, you will get a very good result, he will call you and say thank you.....for those who have been buying from us, then it doesn't really matter whether sending it or not..'*

In this case, a box of mooncakes is only worth a few pounds but it is 'Four Liang (that lifts up thousand s of Jin'. The few pounds of mooncakes could secure a big business deal.

Contrary to the relational self, the instrumental anti-relational self shows an anti-familial and emotionless aspect. Through the construction of the gift as an instrumental 'investment', as a 'bullet' for fighting, and as result-oriented strategy 'Four *liang* lifts up thousands of *jin*', the opposition and instrumentality in anti-relational self is revealed.

## 6.5 Summary

In this chapter, two aspects of identities are explored: the familial aspect of the emotional relational self drawing upon discursive resources of familism and the anti-familial aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self drawing upon discursive resources of anti-familism. These two aspects of identities are analyzed both generally and locally in the gifting practice. The familial aspect of self is explored generally in the gifting practice through identity construction, relationship construction, and the construction of emotional attachment. It is found that sales managers construct kinship and friendship relationships with their customers. To do this, a series of family-oriented and friend identity metaphors are used: *brothers*, *relatives*, *family members*, *good friends*, *companions*. The emotional attachment for this familial aspect of self is constructed through the use of *xin*: heart and mind. *Xin* is used to construct the mutual attitudes of the sales managers and customers through the phrase: 'comparing one's *xin* (heart/mind) to the other's *xin* (heart/mind)'. The strength of the emotional attachment is also indicated through a few other '*xin*'-related phrases: 'knowing one's *xin* (heart/mind)' 'exchange *xin* (heart/mind) with the other'. The emotional attachment involved in this aspect of self is captured through these series of use of *xin*.

This familial aspect of self is also explored in a localised gifting context: a festival gifting incident. In this localised context, the construction of emotional attachment is mainly through the construction of the festival gift. The word *xin* (heart/mind) is used to construct the gift. The analysis has shown different aspects of the emotions involved: gift is '*xin yi*': an emotional attachment from the heart; the arrival of gift is the arrival of heart (*xin dao*). Accepting the gift is accepting the *xin*: emotional attachment. Gifts could be rejected, but the *xin* attached to the gift has to be accepted when making the refusal.

The anti-familial aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self is explored within the same general context: gifting practice. In this generalised construction, a contractual relationship is constructed through the use of the identity metaphor of: spy. The emotional attachment between them is denied, and *xin* is constructed as a tool for economic gains in the market place. In the localised festival incident, a contractual and a conflictual relationship are constructed through the construction of gift as 'investments' and 'bullet'. The emotional attachment is therefore denied and emotional detachment is thus constructed. Gift is sent out for an instrumental purpose: problem-solving in business.

The constructions of the two aspects of self are highly contextual. In the next chapter, I will move on to another context: corruption context. In practice, corruption may be seen as a context of gifting as well, since it also involves giving gifts, but high value gifts. In this context, there are two other contradictory aspects of self: the ethical aspect and the anti-ethical aspect of self.

## **Chapter 7 Data Analysis: Ethics and Anti-ethics**

In this chapter, another two discursive resources: ethics and anti-ethics are drawn upon for the identity constructions of the emotional relational and instrumental anti-relational self in the incident of corruption. These two discursive resources result in the ethical aspect and anti-ethical aspect of identity construction. In this chapter, these two aspects of identity construction will be explored in the corruption incident. My intention here is not to discuss what makes for corruption and whether the incident is a corruption, since where corruption starts is open to debate. Here, this gifting incident is referred to as a 'corruption incident' because it is commonly perceived as a corruption event by the sales managers. Corruption is therefore viewed as a discursive construct by the sales managers. In this chapter, the background of the incident will be introduced first; the ethical aspect of the emotional relational self and the emotionality will then be discussed; and finally, the anti-ethical aspect of the anti-relational self and the instrumentality will be discussed.

### **7.1 Background of the Corruption Incident**

In this section, another form of gifting will be analyzed: corruption gifting practice. Here, the corruption incident is framed as 'corruption' because it is viewed by all the sales managers as an act of monetary corruption. How sales managers make sense of this event as corruption and construct their identities accordingly will be explored here. This incident occurs initially through a gifting request from the customers during my period of stay in the company. I am able to observe the response of the sales manager and the discussions the sales managers have on this issue in a search for a solution to the request. Though I see the beginning of this event, the sales manager who is in

charge of this incident has not yet responded to the customer's request at the time that I leave the company. Therefore there is no way to find out what happens next after I leave. What could be discussed through this incident is how sales managers make sense of the events at the initial stage; how corruption is constructed; and how sales managers construct their sense of self in this construction of so-called corruption by them.

During the 7 weeks of data collection in the company, the head of the sales department offers me a chance to shadow a sales manager: Zhen, for a one-week business trip. The trip is in the third week of my stay in the company. It involves visiting long-standing and new customers in five different cities in the same region. This trip offers me a very good chance to be an observer from another perspective: how sales managers actually do Guanxi with their customers, after hearing about their reflections on how they do Guanxi in the office. In this case, the data collected during the business trip could offer a complementary perspective on the data collected in the company setting, and shed light upon the multiple context-sensitive identity constructions of the sales managers.

This business trip is one of the regular sales visits by the sales managers. It mainly involves sales visit to the long-standing, new and potential customers within a region under the same sales manager. It is mainly business-oriented, with purposes of building up Guanxi with new and potential customers, strengthening Guanxi with existing customers, getting information about the latest needs of the customer and tailoring the products to the needs.

In this context, an incident takes place on the last two days of the business trip. On the last day of the trip, Zhen tells me about the text messages he received in the previous



evening from one of his long-standing customer's company. My host company (the sales company) has been a supplier for this customer company for a long time. Zhen knows the purchasing manager in the company well. However, at the time of the data collection, a new purchasing manager is appointed to be in charge of the business with the sales company. At the same time, the customer company is also looking for a supplier for a few newly developed products. Zhen also wants to be a supplier for these new products. For the sales company, maintaining the current business deal and hoping to expand to other products are two major concerns for them. Under such a context, an incident occurs. This incident initiates through a text message sent out by the newly-appointed purchasing manager in the customer company during the trip. According to Zhen, the customer requests some gifts from him to secure the renewal of the current contract. Otherwise, the current contract will not be renewed. Zhen communicates with the customer through a few text messages immediately. I am not allowed to read all the text messages on the mobile phone screen due to their sensitive nature. However, the sales manager read out a few messages from the customers that he thinks constitutes corruption. These messages are noted down as part of the data for this incident.

Regarding the importance of the customer and the complexities involved, Zhen discusses the solution with three people in the company: Chen, Hu and the head of the sales department: Shen. Data on their discussion is collected. Later, these managers also talk about this corruption incident in informal interviews with the researcher. Data is collected from these informal interviews.

In this so-framed 'corruption' incident, I have no further access to information on whether this so-called 'corruption' happens or not in the end after I left. However, the business trip, the discussion of the corruption among the sales managers as they

requested and their views on this voiced out in the informal interviews with the researcher offer rich data and three different perspectives on how sales managers construct themselves in this situation whether corruption happens or not in the end. Through analysis of the incidents, two contradictory aspects of self are constructed: ethical and anti-ethical aspects, which will be discussed below.

## 7.2 Emotional Relational Self: Ethics

In this incident, both the sales manager and the customer construct an ethical aspect of identity construction in their actual interaction with each other. In the data of the perceived 'corruption', an ethical self is constructed by both the sales managers and the customers in their perceived 'corruption' practices. To be more specific, the ethical self is constructed through the construction of 'corruption' practice as 'cooperation', 'money' as promotion fee' and 'getting the contract' as 'getting help'.

Firstly, the 'corruption' practice is reconstructed by the customer as 'cooperation' practice between each other. The corruption is constructed as a cooperation practice through drawing upon business discourse. In the text message sent from the customer, corruption is initially defined by the customers as a 'cooperation, as the following shows:

*Li: 'if I give you an order of some products, how are we going to cooperate?'*

*'I wish our cooperation would be a long-term one and a happy one'*

In this narrative, Li is the newly appointed purchasing manager in the customer company. According to Zhen, he receives the above text message from Li, implying her request of money corruption. The 'if' conditional suggests a consequence of the business order: 'cooperation' between each other. The amount of money is open to

negotiation between the two of them, as the sentence suggested: ‘how are we going to cooperate’? Furthermore, the business nature of the ‘cooperation’ is further defined through the two adjectives: ‘long-term’ and ‘happy’. In this initial text message, a professional self is constructed by Li in front of the sales managers.

The customer’s identity is further constructed in the following text messages with Zhen. Zhen also constructs a professional self by talking to the customer through drawing upon business negotiation discourse. Zhen replies and negotiates with Li, to the effect that if they cooperate, then the host company also wants to become the suppliers for the two newly developed products in the customer company.

Li replies to the negotiation text message from Zhen. Li’s reply is shown in the following narrative:

*Li: ‘看到你的诚意后, 我会尽量帮你’.*

*w-f-w: see- your-cheng-yi, I-will-use all the effort-help-you*

*WM:*

*Cheng: 1. Sinere, honest 2. Real*

*Yi: 1.meaning, idea 2. wish, desire, intention 3.anticipate, expect 4. suggestion, hint, trace*

*DT: after seeing your sincere intention, I will help you with all my efforts*

*IT: after seeing how much sincerity is in you, I will then help you with all my efforts.*

Similar to the construction of gift in the ritualistic gifting practice, money here is also phrased as a *yi*, which means ‘wish, desire and intention’. In the festival occasion, gift as a *xin yi*, means a wish from the heart, highlighting the symbolic and emotional nature of the gift and, downplaying the materialistic side of the gift. In this narrative, the customer also employs the *yi*, but differently, *yi* is used in combination with another Chinese word: *cheng*, which means ‘sincere and honest’. They are combined

together and used as a set phrase, meaning ‘sincerity’ and ‘good faith’. Corruption is therefore being equated to ‘sincerity’ and ‘good faith’. The materialistic nature of corruption is covered implicitly by the emotional construction of sincerity and intention. The corruption practice is further justified through the word: ‘help’. The return for the corruption is phrased as ‘help’ from the customer; a professional self is further strengthened.

The money involved in corruption is constructed as ‘fees of thanks’. In an interview, Hua describes how the sales manager presents the money gift to the customers in direct speech, as the following narrative shows:

Hua: ‘ *(we have been) always thankful for your support, and hope that we could support each other in the future....this is some fees of thanks and fees of product promotion* ’

Here, corruption is constructed as ‘fees of thanks’ to the customer and ‘fees of promotion’ for the customer’s hard work. Different from the business discourse presented above, in which corruption is free from money-related words, corruption is constructed in a hybridized way through two different discourses, which are reflected in the hybridized use of the words here. On one hand, the use of ‘thanks’ positively highlights the symbolic and immaterialistic part, and use of ‘promotion’ shows a business orientation. On the other hand, both ‘thanks’ and ‘promotion’ are used in combination with ‘fees’, and therefore the materialistic nature is being highlighted, rejecting the emotions. However, both of them hybridize together within the same phrase and the same narrative in great harmony.

During my participant observation of this corruption incident, both the customers and sales managers construct the corruption as ‘cooperation’ and ‘support’ with each other.

The money given to the customers is constructed as ‘expenses’ for the customers’ hard work. Embedded within this corruption incident, both of the actors’ identities are mutually constructed and reproduced as business partners, through the discourse of business cooperation. Though an ethical aspect of the emotional relational self is constructed for the sales managers, an anti-ethical aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self is also constructed.

### **7.3 Instrumental Anti-relational: Anti-ethics**

After the trip, Zhen discusses this corruption request with three other sales managers in the sales department, including the head of the sales department and; two other senior sales managers: Hu and Chen. In their discussion, an anti-ethical aspect of identity is constructed drawing upon discursive resources of anti-ethics. In this section, this anti-ethical aspect of identity will be discussed through the reconstruction of ‘corruption’ practice, and the reconstruction of ‘money’ involved in corruption.

Firstly, an anti-ethical aspect is achieved through the reconstruction of corruption practice. Corruption is regarded commonly by the sales managers as unethical and law-breaking, as commented by Hua: *‘the person who bribes and the person who receives the bribery are both violating the law and illegal’*. In this narrative, both the sales managers and the customers are people constructed as unethical and violating the law. However, paradoxically, though acknowledged as unethical practice, the sales managers try to legitimize and naturalise it for themselves at the same time, which could be shown in Shen’s narrative:

*Shen: 'Human all have a pursuit and a dream for a good life...then there how to make this dream come true..some use legal and some use illegal ways...it all depends on a person's morality..if you don't give money. He probably would terminate the contract'.*

In this narrative, customers are attributed as the cause of the corruption and an unethical construction of the customer is constructed. The customers' corruption request is constructed as an 'illegal' means for the 'dream and pursuit for a good life', and corruption is reconstructed as an immoral and illegal activity chosen by the customers. Since sales managers are constructed as powerless and inferior to the customers, they are ethical managers who are forced by the unethical customers to practice corruption. An 'immoral' and 'superior' customer and an 'ethical' 'inferior' sales manager are constructed. This ethical identity is further constructed as an act of following the company policy.

*Chen: 'As for our company, including the general manager, the policy (for this) is: not to support it, that is we don't want this happen in our company, and not to go against it..., we can't go against it, since there is a need from the customers' .... 'it is a social practice, both in China and abroad' .*

Company policy is used here to construct corruption as a business practice and a social practice. Customers are implicitly constructed as the initiators of the corruption and causality is constructed between the customer and the corruption, while no causality link is proposed for the sales managers and the corruption. Furthermore, Chen legitimizes it as a legal practice through drawing upon a discourse of taxation, as the following narrative shows:

*Chen: 'we have a basic price, and he could increase this price a bit, (the money from the difference of the prices) would be his business expenses, actually it is recognized in taxation as a business expenses... it is like we (offer him this money) to invite him for dinner together, if the business cooperation goes well between us'.*

Here, Chen comments upon some corruption practices which are achieved through invoicing a higher price in payment to the customer company than it actually is. The difference in the actual payment and the stated payment on the invoice will be taken by the customers. This difference will appear in the sales company's finance as business expense paid to the customers' promotion of the product. Here, Chen uses this practice to legitimize the corruption practice on the part of the sales managers.

The sales managers acknowledge the illegal and unethical nature of the corruption and in a way an anti-ethical aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self is constructed through committing these practices. However, paradoxically, they try to legitimize themselves also as ethical through the company practices, through the attribution of the corruption to the customers. While doing so, unavoidably an unethical self and an unethical other (the customer) is still constantly constructed in the corruption practices. Corruption is rephrased as an instrumental 'implicit' practice of 'exchanging conditions with conditions', as shown below:

*Hua: it is an implicit rule in this industry, everyone knows this rule.*

*Shen: it is about exchanging condition with conditions.*

Corruption is constructed as an 'implicit rule' in the industry. The use of the word 'implicit' suggests the secretive nature of this practice and 'rule' suggests that it is a general and recognized practice in this industry. Corruption is explicitly acknowledged here in the discussion among the sales managers. To be more specific about this practice, Shen constructs the profit and exchange-oriented nature of the corruption as a practice of 'exchanging conditions with condition'. The condition set up by the customers is that managers need to meet the financial needs of the customers. The condition sets up by the manager is that *'the customers will meet the*

*manager's needs of getting the business contracts'* (Zhen) as well. The corruption is explicitly framed as a negotiation of profit-oriented conditions. A 'money relationship' is assumed here. Corruption is phrased as an act of negotiated exchange. Both parties need to meet each other's conditions set upon the exchange activity.

In this corruption practice, customers are constructed as 'greedy animals' and sales managers are 'animal keepers' whose responsibility is to feed the animals for an instrumental purpose, as shown below:

*Shen: 'Humans are all greedy animals'*

*Zhen: 喂饱她, 就给他吃饱喝好, 吃人的嘴软, 拿人的手短*

*w-f-w T: feed-full-her, give-him-eat-full-drink-good, eat- other's-mouth-soft, take-others-hand-short*

*DT: it is to feed him till full and drink him something good, eating others, one's mouth will be soft, taking from others, one's hand will be short.*

*IT: it is to satisfy his needs; those who get gifts from us would help us by saying good things or give us a hand when we need help*

In this narrative, Shen constructs the customers as 'greedy animals'. The greediness for money is constructed as greediness for food, as shown in the second narrative above. The second narrative used by Zhen is a traditional Chinese phrase; indicating that people who get benefits from others will reciprocate in other ways either in the short run or in the long run. In this narrative, the greediness for food is indicated by the two verbs: 'eat' and 'drink'. The amount of money offered to the customers is indicated through the adjective: 'full'. 'Good' indicates the quality of the food. The cultural meaning of this traditional phrase is well captured by Yang (1994):



*'After one has eaten of other's food, one's mouth finds it difficult to 'harden' and purse up to refuse the other's request for help or to say bad things about the other. When one takes a gift from someone, the hand grows short, and so cannot reach out to push that person away when he or she needs help. Nor can the shortened hand reach out to hit or make trouble for the other. Mouths that have eaten and hands that have taken become 'easy to persuade' and likely to speak well for their hosts to others, especially their superior' (Yang, 1994: 197-198).*

Secondly, the 'money' involved in the corruption is reconstructed as 'free lunch' and 'pie', as the narrative shows:

*Shen: 'There is no free lunch in this world....and there is no pie falling down from the sky'.*

The money offered to the customers is metaphorically constructed as lunch and pie. The use of the adjective: 'free' and word phrase: 'falling from the sky' indicate that the food is free of charge. However, the 'free of charge' nature of the lunch and the pie are both negated at the same time in the narratives via the word: 'no'.

Money is also constructed as 'lamb wool' and the customers are constructed as 'lamb', as the following narrative shows:

*胡: 反正就是羊毛出在羊身上了嘛,*

*w-f-w T: after all- is-wool-from- lamb-body.*

*DT: after all the lamb wool still comes from the lamb.*

*IT: in the long run, whatever you're given, you pay for.*

This narrative is a set phrase in Chinese language and is used to refer to situations where, whatever a person is given, one has to pay for sooner or later, in one form or another. 'Lamb wool' coming from the 'lamb' indicates that the money given to the

customers will be eventually earned back from the customers as well. Whatever the sales manager gives to the customers, in the long run, the money will be paid back by the customer through business deals from the customer company.

Thirdly, the corruption practice is also reconstructed as a practice of buying and selling, as shown by Chen's narrative:

*Chen: 天堂就在我们心中, 只要你愿意买通自己, 你就可以住进去。*

*w-f-w: haven-is-in-our-Xin-middle, as long as- you-willing-Mai-Tong-yourself, you-could-live -in.*

*WM: Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention*

*Mai: buy, purchase; bribe, persuade*

*Tong: pass through, common, communicate*

*DT: haven is in the middle of our heart, as long as you are willing to buy yourself through, you could live there.*

*IT: Haven is in our heart and mind, as long as you are willing to buy yourself off, you could live in the haven.*

In this incident, Zhen asked advice from Chen and got the above words as a text message.

In Chen's narrative, 'haven' and *xin* are used together to symbolize the emotions after securing a business contract successfully through corruption. In order to 'live in the haven', a prerequisite is shown through the use of a conditional sentence: 'as long as you are willing to buy yourself off'. 'Buying yourself off' is not used here in its literal sense, but in symbolic sense. It refers implicitly to 'buying the customer off'. Thus, corruption is constructed as a buying and selling between sales managers and

customers. An anti-ethical aspect of the sales manager is constructed, drawing upon the discursive resource of anti-ethics

#### **7.4 Summary**

In this chapter, two discursive resources that sales managers draw upon for identity construction: ethics and anti-ethics are explored in a corruption incident. Drawing upon ethics, sales managers construct an ethical aspect of emotional relational self. The ethical aspect of identity is constructed through the construction of different aspects in corruption practice, including: corruption as business cooperation; money required by the customers as product promotion fee; and securing the contract on the conditions of corruption as offering help on a business level. The anti-ethical aspect of identity and the instrumentality involved is constructed through the construction of corruption practice and the identities of the customers. Customers are constructed as instrumental greedy animals; corruption practice is constructed as an instrumental tool of buying-selling for the improvement of life quality.

In the next chapter, I will move on to discuss the identity construction in the context of face-to-face communication between sales managers and customers. Two discursive resources are found to be drawn upon for the identity construction: conformity and adaptability, which will be addressed in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 8: Data Analysis: Conformity and Adaptability**

In the previous chapter, the identity constructions of the sales managers were discussed within the context of gifting: ritualized gifting and corruption gifting.

In this chapter, the identity constructions of the sales managers will be analyzed in a context of a meeting with two customers in the same customer company. How sales managers construct their identities in this spontaneous interaction with the customer will be explored. Therefore, an incident of a sales visit meeting, in which I participate as an observer, will be chosen for further analysis here. In this incident of a sales meeting, the sales managers construct two other aspects of selves towards the customers: a conforming aspect of the emotional relational self and an adaptive aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self. As discussed in section 3.4.1, conformity exists between the parties who have unequal power relationships and who have the different ranks on the social hierarchy. It is closely related to the five relationship hierarchy in Chinese culture. It refers to how people in the lower relationships hierarchy and people who are less powerful show conformity and tolerance to the other party, in order to maintain harmony between the unequal parties. Therefore, sales managers drawing upon this conformity to author their versions of self in interaction with customers is what I call the 'conforming aspect' identity.

These two different aspects of identities will be analyzed in turn in this chapter. The background of this incident will be introduced firstly. Then the conforming aspect of relational self will be analyzed through: the metaphors (students, younger brothers) used by the sales managers to refer to themselves; and the corresponding metaphors (teacher, experts, elder brother) used by the sales managers to refer to the customers. Later, the adaptive aspect of anti-relational self will be discussed in the reflection

narratives of the sales managers: the metaphors (human, devil, thing, gun, lute, player) used by the sales managers to refer to themselves; and the corresponding metaphors (human, devil, thing, target, cow) used by the sales managers to refer to the customers; and the collocating metaphors (1 million, wear tall hat, Kong Fu) merged together with the identity construction of the sales managers.

### **8.1 Background of the Sale Visit**

This is an incident that occurs during my second business trip with two sales managers for my data collection. It is a 10-day intensive business trip mainly for sales visits. Business trips are a vital part of the sales managers' working life and around half of the working time of the sales managers is on business trips. The purpose of the business trip is to maintain and strengthen the relationship with the existing customers, to have a better understanding of the customers' needs and wants in the market; and to promote new products to the customers. Since the trip is done right after an exhibition fair for the industry, some potential customers at the fair are visited during the 10 day trip as a follow-up. Most of the time during this trip, the customers visited are new customers with whom no business has been done before. The visits are brief and formal in nature. However, during the 10-day business trip, there is one visit to a company that draws particular attention from me. It is a visit to a company which has been doing business with the sales managers for half a year at the time of data collection.

There are a few reasons which make me to choose this incident for analysis here. Firstly, two people – I shall refer to each as customers, who belong to two different departments are met within the same visit. In this visit, the purchasing managers in

this company have been long-standing customers to the sales manager, while the engineer who is in charge of the product test is new to the sales manager. The two customers in two different relationship types require two different ways of communication. It will be possible to explore how the sales manager interacts with this new customers and the long-standing customers within in incident. The different ways the sales managers relate to the customers will be revealed as well.

Secondly, though the two customers belong to the same company, different purposes are held by the sales managers for them. For the visit to the purchasing managers, the business goes well and the purpose of the visit will be to strengthen the existing relationship, but nothing needs to be discussed with regard to their current business. However, Chen wants to promote a new product to the company apart from the existing products that the sales company supplies to the customers, and he wants to know more information about the customer's current suppliers of this new product. Therefore, Chen does not spend his time during the office hours with the purchasing managers; instead we spend the rest of the non-office hours with him during the day.

For the visit to the engineer, the purpose of the visit is to establish a relationship with him and more importantly to promote a new product to him. Since all the products supplied to the company need to be laboratory tested before they can be handed over to the purchasing managers, the sales managers need to promote the products to the engineer and gain the chance from the engineer to test the product in the lab. These different purposes of the visit impact on what is being communicated, and how it is being communicated, in the conversation between people in different relationship types.

Thirdly, the duration of the visit, the result of the visit and the content of the visit provide further reasons to choose this incident. The visit is very lengthy, from 10am in the morning to 1 am the next day, with constant changes in venue, pauses in between and the change of the two customers in the communication. Even with the constant changes of the customers and the venue, the conversation is maintained and carried on very well. The duration of the visit is almost evenly distributed between the two customers. This duration is different from that for other new customers, which is normally 1 -2 hours. The content of the communication does not seem to have any relationship with product promotion at all. Most importantly, the two sales managers remain silent most of the time. These features in this visit differ from the features in other visits. However, the communication is surprisingly efficient and effective. The engineer not only offers a chance to do the test, but also offers to do the test on the same day. The complexities of the relationships involved, the two customer types and the communications give rise to a different way the sales managers relate to the customer, which is different from that analyzed in the previous chapters.

In the next section, the identity construction during the actual interaction with the customers will therefore be analyzed in detail.

## **8.2 Emotional Relational Self: Conformity**

In the interactions with the two customers, drawing on the discursive resource of conformity, a conforming aspect of emotional relational self is constructed by the sales managers when communicating with the customers. This conforming aspect of self is shown through the conformity and submissiveness in the identity constructions for the sales managers towards the customers. Since the conforming aspect is

constructed with two different customers in different relationships within the context of communication, the conforming aspect of identity construction will be analyzed here in the following three different ways: firstly, through the relationships and the relevant metaphoric identity construction for the sales managers and the customers; secondly, through the communication style, that is, listening-centred; and thirdly, through the topic of the communication.

### **8.2.1 Relationships and Metaphor Identity Construction**

Firstly, the conforming aspect of emotional relational self is constructed in two different hierarchical-featured metaphoric relationships: ‘student-teacher/expert’; and ‘younger brother-elder brother’ relationships. Hierarchy is an important feature of Chinese interpersonal relationships in general, and it is an important feature of these two metaphoric relationships in particular. The identities for both of the sales managers and the customers do not emerge randomly; instead they emerge as interdependent, hierarchical adjacent pairs. When communicating with the retired and reemployed engineer, the fixed adjacent identity pair emerges: student-teacher/expert. An inferior student identity is constructed for the sales managers showing conformity and a superior teacher or expert identity is constructed for the customers. When communicating with the purchasing manager, another hierarchical adjacent pair emerges: younger brother-elder brother. Though the purchasing manager is younger than the sales manager, the purchasing manager is still constructed as the elder brother and the sales manager as a younger brother. In these two relationships, hierarchy is clearly prescribed, with the customers at a higher position as teachers and elder brothers and the sales managers in the lower positions as students and younger brothers in the hierarchy. These two hierarchical relationships fit into two relationship



types in the Five Hierarchical Relationships: brotherly relationship and superior-subordinate relationship. Each individual embedded in the hierarchical relationship has a different prescribed role and is assumed 'to enact that role accordingly' (Gao 1996, p.88) within the hierarchy. Then, the social order will be maintained and the hierarchical harmony will be achieved in the interpersonal relationship.

The roles of the teacher-student, elder brother-younger brother relationships are closely related to that of the father-son relationship. The father-son relationship is at the core of the five hierarchical relationships. The norm of filial piety needs to be strictly exercised in this relationship: children are expected to submit to the parental wishes (Bond and Hwang 1986). This rule of conformity exercised through filial piety could be extended to other hierarchical relationships, like younger brother-elder brothers and students-teachers (Bond and Hwang 1986). With harmony the most important concern for interpersonal relationships, one way to achieve harmony with others is for inferior to show conformity to the superior.

In the sales visit, the engineer customer: Wang introduces himself as a re-employed retired engineer due to his great expertise in his field. Then immediately, he also introduces himself as a very hardworking person since he still keeps himself informed with the latest technology even in English. During the product recommendation, he asks some very technical questions to show his expertise within the first 10-15 minutes in conversation with him. He seems to construct an expert identity in front of all of us. Conforming to this expectation of relationship, the sales manager Chen addresses Wang as 'teacher' and himself as a 'student' in the communication.

With regard to the purchasing manager: Liu, Chen has met him before and is closer to Liu than the engineer. Compared to Wang, Chen and Liu are in a more familiar

relationship. During the visit, we do not have time to talk to him during the office hours, but instead we spend time with him during the rest of the non-office hours of the day. We have lunch and dinner with him. After dinner in the evening, he shows us around and then we go to a coffee shop to have a chat for around 5 hours. For the whole evening, he talks about his family issues. Chen constructs a brotherly relationship with Liu and addresses him as 'elder brother Liu'. The use of 'elder brother' in front of one's surname is a way commonly used to address people who are respectful non-kinships. Though Liu is a lot younger than Chen, the superiority of Liu is recognized explicitly in the conversation and conformity is shown through the construction of the customer as elder brother.

The conforming aspect of self is constructed here, showing submissiveness to the superior ones in the hierarchical relationships. The Chinese not only conform to superiorities, but also conform to authorities. Research findings 'have shown that Chinese are quite conspicuous by their deferential attitudes towards whomever or whatever they consider an authority' (Yang 1986, p.127). Unconditional submissiveness to authority is found in Chinese people, especially to authority of age and status (Yang 1986).

In the communication, Wang is constructed as an authoritative figure: a 'teacher' and an 'expert' in his field. Wang is recognized as an authority of expertise and status. It could be reflected in the way Wang is addressed. At the beginning, Wang is addressed as 'Engineer Wang', which is a common way to address people, that is, with their position titles in front of their surname, to indicate their position in the hierarchy. At the end of the talk, Chen changes the address to 'Wang Lao'. A person could be addressed by his or her surname followed by the word 'Lao'. The combination of surname followed by 'Lao' is a commonly used honorific way to address a person

with great respect and honour, often for people who are old and make extraordinary achievements in their field. The use of this address reflects the hierarchical respect for Wang.

As for the purchasing manager, the sales manager constructs a conforming aspect of identity through a construction of brother identity with him. Liu, as an 'elder brother', is recognized as an authority of age. Conformity and submission to the authority is presupposed in Chinese interpersonal communication. That is, not to challenge the authority, not to show disagreement to the authority in communication.

### **8.2.2 Communication Style**

Conformity to authority is not only reflected in the unchallenging and submissive communication styles, but also in the speakers and listeners in the communication (who is entitled to speak); how it is being communicated: the style of the communication and the topic of communication (what to say).

During the sales visit, the communication style between the sales managers and the customers are more uni-directional. Most of the time, it is the customers who do most of the talking and we listen. Every now and then, we show our agreement with their opinions and give compliments. The talk with Wang, whom the sales managers had never met before, begins at 10am and finishes at 4 pm with a lunch break for around an hour and a half. During this period of time, we have a long face-to-face conversation with Wang in his office. In the first 10-15 minutes of the conversation, he talks with us about the products and raises some relevant questions. Most of the time, our conversation is featured with the pattern of questions and answers: Wang asks questions and we answer. For the rest of the time, we mainly listen to his talk,

which has nothing to do with business at all. We listen attentively and remain silent most of the time. Whenever we get the chance to talk, it is to show agreement with him and make compliments to him. Though most of the time, nothing is related to business, the communication is very effective. He agrees to take some sample product for laboratory test immediately, to be done within the same day.

The same communication style is adopted when interacting with the purchasing manager: Liu. We spend time together over lunch and dinner. After the dinner, he shows us around the local city, and then we have drinks in a coffee shop. The activities with Liu are even more irrelevant to business in the sales visit. We spend around 8 hours together during the day: lunch time and 7 hours in the evening from 6 pm till 1am the next morning. The communication is more interactional during the lunch time, with each of us contributing opinions to the conversation. However, in the evening, especially during the 5 hour-chat in the coffee shop, we are listeners, most of the time, to his talk which is totally unrelated to business. Agreements are also shown to almost all of his opinions. This conversation is also surprisingly effective. At the end, though no business is being talked about, the purchasing manager tells us their current suppliers of the product that the sales managers are trying to promote.

A communication style of 'listening-centeredness' (Gao et al., 1996, p.285) with an uncritical, submissive attitude towards both of the customers are adopted here. This feature is related to the hierarchical structure in Chinese society. 'Given that individuals in Chinese culture need to position themselves in the hierarchal structure and to perform their roles accordingly, the role of speakers and listeners is determined by existing status and role relationships' (Gao et al., 1996, p. 285). Not everyone is entitled to talk, only those of seniority, authority, experience, knowledge, and expertise are to be recognized as having a voice in the communication (Gao et al.,

1996). Therefore, the customers as authorities of expertise, as teachers and with seniority as elder brothers are positioned in a superior place in the hierarchy, and the sales managers are in an inferior position in the hierarchy. Therefore an asymmetrical style of communication (Gao et al., 1996) is adopted: the superior customers do all the talking and the inferior sales managers do all the listening in the communication activities. This listening-centeredness of communication between superior and inferior shows a non-confrontational way of life in Chinese culture (Gao et al., 1996), and maintains the interpersonal harmony .

### **8.2.3 Content of the Communication**

Another feature of the interpersonal communication concerns what is being communicated: the content of the talk. The choice of the topic with the customers also shows the sales manager's conformity to the customers. The sales managers are in two different relationships with the customers: a more intimate one with the purchasing manager: elder brother-younger brother relationship; and a less intimate one with the engineer in the first face-to-face encounter. These two relationship types are of different intimacy to the sales managers. It is found that the Chinese disclose differently when talking to people of different intimacies and therefore variations in topics result among people of different closeness in relationships (Rubin et al., 2000). According to Yang and Hwang (1980 in Bond and Hwang 1986, p.249), 'arranged in order of intimacy value, .....areas for conversation can be depicted as an onion, with... topics at the its core, then topics related to family, and topics of general affairs which have the lowest intimacy value located on the surface'. When interacting with others, the relationship types have to be taken into consideration: 'the content of communication between casual friends, teachers and students, business associates and

public officials would involve only topics on the surface of the onion' (Bond and Hwang 1986, p. 250).

This relationship-based topic variation is reflected in the conversations between the sales managers and the customers. The projection of an elder brother-younger brother relationship constructs an 'expressive' type of relationship which exists among family members. While the projection of 'teacher-student' relationship constructs a 'mixed' types of relationship which exists among friends. The different intimacy of expressive and mixed type of relationship impacts on the depth and breadth of the conversation and its topics, as Chen comments on the topic of conversations with the customers:

*Chen: A lot of customers are like brothers, when I visit him, we don't talk about products at all, we just chat with each other.*

*Chen: When we visit long-standing customers, we chat like friends...we talk about everything. ..he will talk about his girlfriend if he has one, talk about his family if he has one...if he has neither family nor girlfriend, then we talk about funny things.*

The conversation with the purchasing manager, in an expressive brotherly relationship, is characterised by a depth of the conversation: highly personal topics are talked about and hidden messages are revealed. In the five hours' conversation, as a speaker in the talk, Liu dominates the conversation with his family problems. His conversation is mainly about his wife. He shows great affection and appreciation for his wife in the conversation. His love stories with his wife are narrated in great personal details: including how they meet; how long they have been courting each other; their fight together to get the permission from his wife's family to get married; and how much love he felt for his wife. These topics are talked about for around 3 hours. Throughout this time, we just keep listening attentively with fascinated facial expressions.

The conversation not only shows depth, but also breadth. He talks on topics that not only include the positive happy parts of his life, but also on topics about the negative stressful part of his life. He feels a lot of financial pressure in his life, since his wife is from a wealthy family and he is from a poor family and, she marries him without the approval of her family. He feels indebted to his wife for her sacrifice and also feels guilty to his wife since he is under financial difficulties. He talks a lot about the financial difficulties in great detail. He only manages to buy a small flat in his home town as a family home, since he could not afford to buy a small one in the city where he works. His wife lives in this flat and he lives in another city where he works. They are living apart since he could not afford to rent a proper flat while paying the mortgage for his home at the same time. He only lives in an accommodation room provided by the company. In the rest of the two hours, a lot of financial details are provided to show his financial pressure and his indebtedness to his wife.

While money is the least often talked about topic among Chinese good friends (Rubin et al., 2000), the topic of financial pressures with Liu reveals a close relationship. An expressive brother identity is constructed through the depth of the conversation. In line with these constructed metaphoric relationships, conformity and submissiveness is constructed for the sales managers' emotional relational self.

Since the topic reveals the relationship difference with different people. The topic with Wang is totally different to that of Liu. During the whole day talking with Wang, from 10am to 4pm, he takes a speaker role and dominates the talk; we adopt a submissive role as learners.

The content of the talk is family-related and achievement-centred. The talk is mainly dominated by the life stories of his family members: his two children and his two

grandchildren. A small amount of time is also devoted to his apprentices in the company. The talk is dominated by the various kinds of achievement of his children and grandchildren, and also his apprentices. In general, the topic of the communication is achievement-oriented and 'modern Chinese parents place great emphasis on the achievement of their children' (Ho 1986, p. 25).

Wang starts the talk with his achievement of being engineer re-employed as an engineer, due to his excellent expertise, after his retirement in the company. Then he carries on talking about his expertise and professionalism: he still tries to keep himself updated with the most advanced technology by reading English articles. A hardworking image is projected by him. However, he develops the projection of this image by talking about the achievement of his children. Right after this, he tells us that he does not know English at all; he read the articles with the help of his two children. Then he explicitly attributes the reason for his children's ability to help with his English to the degree qualifications that they received. For the whole morning, he starts his stories in the greatest detail about the achievements of his children: including academic achievements: the degree qualifications, one with a master degree and another one with a doctoral degree; the number of studentships his children receive; the exact scores of some important exams in university; the hardworking attitudes of his children. The achievement not only covers the academic areas, but also covers the marriages of his two children. He talks about his daughter-in-law and his son-in-law, including their job descriptions. Special attention is given to his daughter-in-law's prestigious family background in the conversation. He is very happy when he sees that the two sales managers listen with great admiration. Then he continues the talk with the cost of his children's wedding banquet, the number of the people invited to the banquet and their positions and the degree qualifications of their spouses. He carries



on to talk about the career achievement of his children: the positions and the jobs his children have gained; the amount of salary they are earning; the people with whom his children are socializing; the type of houses his children are living in. Whenever he talks about achievements, academic achievement is the most important criterion for his definition of success. He finishes talking about his children and children-in-law. In the afternoon, he carries on talking about his grand children and his apprentice in a similar way. After he learns that the sales manager has an 11-year old daughter, he starts to teach how to be a good parent and help children to achieve academic success. For the whole day, we are almost silent listening about his checklist of the achievements of his children, grandchildren and apprentices in the form of successful life stories. Wang's focus on children's academic and career achievement in his narration is a typical feature of fathers' and grandfathers' expectations of their children and grandchildren, since 'the most frequently mentioned personal characteristics expected of the child when grown up were those concerned with competence and achievement, followed by those concerned with moral character, sociability, and controlled temperament' (Ho and Kang, 1984; cited in (Ho 1986, p.25). Throughout the talk, we need to give compliments whenever a new academic and career achievement is talked about. Wang's identity as a good teacher is constructed implicitly through his narratives of his successful childrearing experiences.

In this sales visit, a situational conforming aspect of emotional relational self is constructed here. It is done through the sales manager constructing a self-identity as student and younger brother, who submits to, and shows conformity to, the customers as 'teachers and elder brother'. The conforming aspect of self is realized through the different positions of the sales managers (listeners) and the customers (speakers) in the narratives, the style of the communication, that is, listening-centred, and the content

variation of the communication to cater for the customers in different relationship types.

In the next section, how sales managers construct their identity and the customers' identity when they finish the visit and reflect upon their interactions, will be explored.

### **8.3 Instrumental Anti-relational Self: Adaptability**

After the sales visit, when the sales managers reflect upon their interaction with the customers, their relationship with the customers is reconstructed in an oppositional way: as an instrumental business relationship. The change in the way the relationship is constructed results in the change of their aspects of identities embedded in the relationship as well. In their reflection narratives, sales managers construct an instrumental anti-relational self with the customers. Conformity towards the customers is reconstructed as adaptability. Drawing upon adaptability, an adaptive aspect of instrumental self is constructed.

The adaptive aspect of self and the instrumentality involved is constructed through a list of metaphoric identities of both the sales managers and the customers. These metaphoric identities could be grouped into three or four different categories. The metaphoric identities of customers could be grouped into four different categories: as *human beings* (human), *non-human animals* (cow), *unanimated objects* (thing, target) and *devil*. Collocating with the four categories are three metaphor identity categories for the sales managers as: *human beings* (human, singer), *unanimated objects* (thing, gun and clay) and devils. These identity constructions emerged as co-occurring concurrent pairs with each other in their reflection narratives.

Conformity is no longer the discursive resource the sales managers draw upon for identity construction. The sales managers see their conformity as an outward submission, which is instrumentally adaptive to the customers' needs in conversations. An inward aggression towards the customers is constructed.

In this section, the adaptive identity will be analyzed as follows: the reconstruction of the relationships between the sales managers and the customers as a distanced outsider relationship; the metaphoric identities embedded in the relationships and the collocating, concurrent identity pairs between the sales managers and the customers; and the impersonal style of the vocabulary use for the metaphoric identities.

### 8.3.1 Construction of Relationships and Metaphoric Identities

In the reflection narratives, the sales managers reconstruct their relationships with the customers from a previously insider relationship to an outsider relationship. Contrary to the family-oriented relationship and teacher-student relationship, a business-oriented instrumental relationship is constructed here, which is indicated from the metaphoric identity categories: humans; non-human animals; unanimated objects; and devils. The metaphors belonging to these categories and used in this discursive context are summarized in the following table:

Categories	Sales Managers	Customers
<b>Human</b>	human, singer, lute-player, shooter,	human, audience, clay-player
<b>Non-human/animals</b>		cow
<b>Unanimated objects</b>	thing	target, thing
<b>Devil</b>	devil	devil

**Table 10 Categories of identity metaphors for sales managers and customers**

As seen in the above table, most of the identity metaphors used fall into the human category. However, the identity metaphors used in this category are neither family-related metaphors nor friendship-related metaphors, but stranger-related metaphors. The use of these metaphors indicates a distant outsider relationship here.

According to Yang (1995), there are three categories of relationships for the Chinese social interaction: ‘family relationship; (friend) relationship; and (stranger) relationships’ (Yang 1995, 31). Members who belong to the first two categories are seen as ‘insiders’ and those (who) belong to the third category are seen as ‘outsider’ (Gao et al., 1996). Since these relationship categories are for human social relationships, Yang’s relationship categories are only applicable for the *human category*.

Based on the distinctions in Yang’s relationship categories and on the finding that the metaphors used are in the *human category*: human, singer, audience, lute-player and clay-player, the relationship constructed could fall into the category of stranger relationship, that is, outsider relationship. For this type of relationship, instrumentality is the main feature. The guiding principle for interaction will be equity-based and highly reciprocal.

As for the other three categories: *the non-human/animal category*, *unanimated object category*, and *devil category*, except for the devil category which exists in another form of existence, the other two categories are considered as inferior to the human category in Confucian Chinese culture. As Confucius said, ‘of all creatures in the world, man is the noblest’ (Wang 2003, p.131). Animals could be used for the advancement of the human species (Wang 2003).

The power hierarchy of these three different categories could be represented through the triangle below:

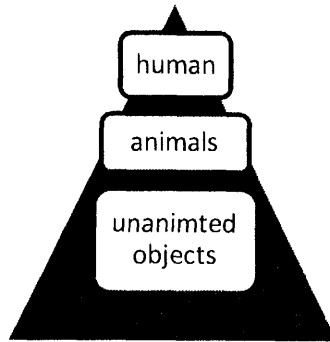


Figure 4 Power hierarchy of three different identity metaphor categories

With *human categories* at the top of the hierarchy and then the *animals and unanimated objects* categories at the bottom, the superiority is decreasing and the animation is also decreasing. Use of metaphors from the same or different categories by the sales managers and the customers will imply different power hierarchies between them. The following table summarizes the patterns of the concurrence of metaphors for sales managers and customers. These concurrent metaphors are used as adjacent identity metaphors-in-use when sales managers reflect upon their communication.

<b>Three Concurrence Patterns for metaphor categories</b>	<b>The adjacent identity metaphor pairs for sales managers (left) &amp; customers (right)</b>	<b>Narratives in which the metaphors are used (metaphors are underscored)</b>
<b>Pattern 1: Use same</b>	<b>(1) Human &amp; human category (e.g.</b>	<b>e.g. When we see the <u>human</u>, we speak the human language;</b>

<p><b>metaphor from same categories</b></p>	<p><u>Human-Human</u>);  (2) <b>Devil &amp; devil category</b> (e.g. <u>ghost – ghost</u>)  (3) <b>Unanimated object &amp; unanimated object category</b> (e.g. <u>thing –thing</u>)</p>	<p>when we see the <u>ghost</u>, we speak the ghost language.   e.g. <u>Things</u> of the same kind gather together.</p>
<p><b>Pattern 2:</b>  Use different metaphors from same category</p>	<p>(1) <b>Human &amp; human category</b> (e.g. <u>Singer-audience</u>)</p>	<p>e.g. <u>Sing</u> different songs in different mountains.</p>
<p><b>Pattern 3:</b>  Use different metaphors from different categories</p>	<p>(1) <b>Human &amp; animal category</b> (e.g. <u>Lute-player – cow</u>)  (2) <b>Human &amp; unanimated object category</b> (e.g. <u>Shooter–target</u>)  (3) <b>Unanimated object &amp; human category</b> (e.g. <u>Clay – clay-player</u>)</p>	<p>e.g. <u>Playing the lute</u> to the <u>cow</u>  He is the <u>target</u>; we need to <u>shoot</u> this target.   e.g. You need to be <u>clay</u>, when it needs to be in a square-shape, you change to a square-shape.</p>

**Table 11 Concurrence patterns for categories of identity metaphors of sales managers and customers**

As shown in the above table, there are three patterns in which these metaphors co-occur together. Firstly, sales managers and customers use the same metaphors from the same category to construct their identity: *human and human; devil and devil; unanimated objects and unanimated objects*. Secondly, they also use different

metaphors but from the same metaphor categories to construct their identities: *human and human category*. For these two patterns, sameness between the sales managers and the customers is emphasized through the use of the same metaphor or use of the same metaphor categories.

For the third pattern, an unequal power relation is constructed. In the third pattern, sales managers and customers use different metaphors from different categories for identity constructions. In this pattern, the sales managers use metaphors from the *human category*, while the customers use metaphors from *animal/unanimated object categories*. According to the Confucian hierarchy of the metaphor categories, sales managers are superior to the customers; and customers as *animals* could be employed for the advancement of the sales managers as *humans*. This power relationship is different from what I found in the conforming self where the sales managers are always in the inferior power position and customers are always in the superior position.

However, there is still one instance of metaphor use in the third pattern that resembles the power difference found in the conforming self. That is, sales managers use metaphors from the inferior *unanimated object category*, but customers use the superior *human category*. This constructs the same power hierarchy as with the conforming self.

After exploring the metaphors, metaphor categories and the power relations between the sales managers and customers, I will discuss the contextual use of these metaphors in detail in the next section.

### 8.3.2 Communication Style and Contents of Communication

The identity metaphors redefine the relationships between the sales managers and the customers; their identities, and their style of communication.

For the conforming self, the communication style is submissive to the superior to show conformity. This conversational feature of conformity is still shown as adaptability in the reflection narratives, by the three patterns of metaphor concurrences. For the first and the second pattern, the conformity is shown through sales managers use of either exactly the same metaphor or different metaphors but from the same category to construct their and their customers' identities. Adaptability is shown through sameness in metaphor and metaphor categories. For the third pattern, though different metaphors from different categories are used, the contextual use of the sales managers depends on the contextual use of the customers'. Adaptability is also shown through this interdependence of metaphor use.

All these metaphors are used in the discursive context of: sales managers' reflecting on the topic variation in communications with the customers. In a local context of 'how sales managers choose the appropriate topics to talk to different customers', the adjacent pairs of identities in the first pattern are used in the following narratives:

*付: 见人说人话, 见鬼说鬼话*

*w-f-w translation: see-human-speak-human-language, see-ghost-speak-ghost-language*

*DT: When we see the human, we speak the human language; when we see the ghost, we speak the ghost language.*

*IT: When you see one person, you talk about this topic, when you see another person, you talk about another topic.*



It is a traditional Chinese phrase describing the importance of the appropriateness of content when talking to different people. Two adjacent identity pairs are used: human-human; and ghost-ghost. In Chinese culture, human and ghost are complete opposites in terms of the form of existence. They are assumed to speak in different languages. In order to communicate with them, both languages are required for a communicator and the languages need to be used according to the one you talk to. Therefore, when seeing a ghost, speaking the human language will make the communication impossible.

This phrase can also be used to refer to the accuracy of the content in the communication. For this meaning, human symbolizes honest people and human language symbolizes the honest content; while the ghost symbolizes the liars and the ghost language symbolizes the lies. Therefore, the meaning of this phrase could be interpreted as: *talking to honest people, we need to be honest; talking to liars, we need be dishonest as well*. This meaning of the phrase again uses two types of people who possess qualities of complete opposites (honesty and lies) to show the extreme variations of the contents and topics in conversations. Together with these topic differences, the conformity of the sales managers is reconstructed here as an instrumental adaptability: the variation of the sales managers' identity depends on that of the customers. A very impersonal style of communication is shown here, through using the general terms for identity construction.

The adaptability is not only reflected upon by the sales managers on the topic level, but also on the thinking level with the customers, as shown below:

物以类聚

w-f-w T: *things-kind-gather*

*DT: things of the same kind gather together*

*IT: 'things of a kind come together; people of a mind fall into the same group; like attracts like; birds of a feather flock together'.*

This is also a traditional Chinese phrase describing the communication between people. It is implied from the phrase that the things in this world are classified according to the commonalities between them. People with commonalities will get along well with each other. These commonalities are further explained in a Chinese-English Dictionary (1995), as shown through the translation from the dictionary in the indirect translations. The commonality could be people having the same mindset. In the data, this phrase refers to the commonalities of similar ways of thinking, same interests and same hobbies, as Chen comments about commonality with customers:

*He likes your personality and you like his personality, then it is very easy for you two to get on well with each other.*

*Who could be a very good friend with you?...of course those who have the same hobbies and interest ...then it would be easier to get on well with each other.*

This metaphoric identity also reflects impersonal style of the communication. The conformity to the customers is reconstructed as a result-oriented instrumental adaptability by the sales managers towards the customers.

The second pattern of the concurrence of the adjacent pair is: using different metaphors from the same category (*singer-audience*), where both metaphoric identities are within the *human category*. This pair also emerges in a Chinese set phrase when the sales managers reflect upon the topic variation for different customers: '*sing different songs on different mountains*'. It also refers to the appropriateness of the content of conversations. In China, there are in total 56

different ethnic groups with only one of them forming the majority ethnic group; the rest of them are all minority groups. In the past, a lot of the minority groups lived in the mountains. A popular practice in the past for some of the minority groups was talking to each other in the form of singing. These songs are generally called mountain songs. With different people living in different mountains, the content of the talk in the form of singing should be different when a person is on different mountains. The mountains are like different customers' companies and the minority group, as audience living in the mountains, are like the customers. Therefore, talking to the customers should be like singing to the customers. Conformity to the customers on the topic levels is again reconstructed as instrumental adaptability with the purpose of entertaining the customers.

The first two patterns of concurrence of adjacent identity pairs, both show adaptability towards the customers. However, the impersonal style of vocabulary: using the general terminology (human, ghost, and thing) and the function-based identities (singer-audiences) reveals the instrumental nature of adaptability, opposite to the close emotional personal relationship in the interaction narratives.

The third pattern of concurrence of the adjacent pairs is: 'lute-player' *from the human category* and the 'cow' *from the non-human animal category*. This pair shows reverse superiority with that in the interaction of the sales managers and the customers. Firstly, the category difference has already established the inequality: the *human categories* being superior and the *animal category* being inferior. Secondly, the meaning of the phrase also shows the same reverse superiority. This pair emerges within the context of choosing a wrong topic on which to talk with the customers. If one talked to the customers with an unsuitable topic, the outcome would be like 'playing the lute to the cow' (*Hu*). Again, it is a traditional Chinese set phrase to

describe the importance of the appropriateness of the content, but with the focus on the result of the wrongly chosen topic for the conversation. It is translated as ‘playing the lute to a cow –address the wrong audience; talk over somebody’s head’ in a Chinese-English dictionary. It comes from a story in the past: a musician plays the music to the cow, but the cow just ignores the music. Later, it is used to refer to a person who talks without paying attention to the audience. In the conversation between the sales managers and the customers, the use of this phrase indicates that adaptability in content is needed.

The adaptability to the customers is on all levels, as shown in the following narrative:

*Shen: We need to make us into clay, when it needs to be a square-shape, then you change to a square-shape. When it needs you to become whatever personality, then you need to become whatever personality. Adjust yourself to fit the customers, for example he like quiet places, then you could go to the coffee shop, or satisfy his likes, ...if this person’s personality is a bit out-going, likes .....must adjust your hobbies, your mood to be identical with your customer, therefore what is necessary is that you need to be flexible, if you do not have a common topic, common hobby, you could not talk together.*

It is shown from the above narrative that the kind of person the sales managers want to project in front of the customers depends situationally on the customers. The adaptation goes beyond the level of topic variation, including hobbies, interests and personalities. It shows a deeper level of identification with the customers.

The final identity pair discussed here belongs to the second pattern of concurrence. It is analyzed here because of a feature it reveals: opposition between the sales managers and the customers. It is a pair in the *category of unanimated objects*: gun-target.

*Chen: For us, ... he is the target, we need to shoot this target. But for the target, ... it is possible for target to be shot by the gun from all the directions...therefore he is more flexible than us...and we need to adjust our directions to cater for his needs.*

Here, the sales managers are like the 'gun' and the customers are like the 'target'. The gun needs to shoot to catch the target. The gun needs to adjust its direction according to the movement of the target. Implicitly, the adaptability of the sales manager towards the customers is shown through the flexible directions of the gun. The opposition is captured through the words of 'gun' and 'target'. The use of the verb: 'shoot' also intensifies the aggression between them. The gun is meant to be shooting the target.

The adaptive aspect of self is also captured through the collocating metaphors. Three metaphors and two phrases are found to be co-occurring with the identity pairs: *millions, tall hat, Kong Fu; fake qing and fake yi*. These metaphors emerge when the sales managers reflect upon the compliments paid to the customers. In the interaction, compliments are paid to show the hierarchical respect to the teacher and care to the elderly brother. A strong sense of sentiment is embedded within these uses of compliments. In the reflection narratives, the compliments are reconstructed as instrumental and result-oriented, full of oppositions towards the customers.

Making the compliments is related to money and phrased as 'giving 1 million' to the customer. The compliment is measured through money. The compliment is also reconstructed as 'wearing a tall hat' for the customers. It is also a traditional Chinese phrase. Wearing a tall hat for someone is a derogatory term. In the past, the hat is related to status and power. It is part of the dress for the government officials in ancient China. However, the gown and the hat vary across different ranks. The high position in the power hierarchy will be related to the size of the hat. In Chinese, 'tall'

and 'high' are expressed through the same Chinese character. If a high position needs a high hat, the high hat, to an extent, is a tall hat. Therefore this high hat signifies people's high position in the hierarchy. 'Wearing tall hat for others' and 'others wearing a tall hat for you' is to place one person in a higher position in the hierarchy than he should be. Therefore more respect and more power is implied through this changed position.

Making compliments needs to be skillful. This skill is like '*practising Chinese Kong Fu*'. *Kong Fu*, also called Chinese martial arts, is for fighting purposes. It requires years to learn the skills in *Kong Fu*. The use of *Kong Fu* is to symbolize the level of skilfulness when making appropriate compliments. Making the right compliments at the right time and to the right person is phrased as '*practising Chinese Kong Fu*'. Given the fighting nature of *Kong Fu*, opposition to customers is shown here.

The opposition is further shown through the denial of the sentiments associated with compliments. The respect and care in compliments in interaction narratives is totally denied here through the use of the two phrases: fake '*qing*' and fake '*yi*'. '*Qing*' and '*yi*' are two Chinese characters meaning affection and emotions. Making compliments is constructed as something of '*fake qing and fake yi*' by the sales managers. The adjective '*fake*' is used to negate emotions in the interaction, as '*fake qing and fake yi*'. Opposition towards the customers is further constructed here.

These collocating metaphors and phrases further show the managers' adaptive aspect of instrumental anti-relational self towards the customers. An adaptive aspect of self is achieved in the reflection through: the reconstructed instrumental relationship; the reconstructed identities as outsiders of the relationship circles; the reverse superiority and opposition in the metaphoric identities; and the collocating metaphors and phrases.

## 8.4 Summary

In this chapter, the conforming aspect of emotional relational self and adaptive aspects of the instrumental anti-relational self are analysed. The analysis of these two aspects of identities is conducted within the context of communication with the customers. It is further located in an actual interaction during a sales visit.

In the actual interaction with the customers, the sales managers draw upon the discursive resource of conformity to construct their conforming aspect of self. Two hierarchical relationships are constructed: student (sales manager)-teacher/expert (customer) and younger brother (sales manager)-elder brother (customer) relationships. The conforming aspect of self is further shown through the main communicator as the customer, the listening-centered communication styles adopted by the sales managers; and the content of the communication as always oriented towards the customers' interest.

In reflecting upon the interaction with the customers, sales managers draw upon the discursive resource of adaptability to construct their adaptive aspect of self. An outsider and instrumental relationship is constructed in the reflection narratives, which could be shown through the use of the identity metaphors belonging to the stranger category. The adaptive aspect of self is further analyzed through the analysis of the metaphor categories: *human category*, *non-human/animal category*, *unanimated object category*, *devil category*. Three patterns of use are found. The sales managers might use the same metaphor from the same category; different metaphors from the same category; and different metaphors from different categories, to construct their identity and their customer's identity. These metaphors, belonging to these three

patterns are later analyzed in detail in their narrative. Finally the metaphors collocating with these identity metaphors are also analyzed to add more understanding to the identity constructions.

In the next chapter, I will move on to the last two aspects of self: the undirected aspect and the directed aspect of self in the context of helping.



## **Chapter 9: Data Analysis: Undirected Reciprocity and Directed Reciprocity**

In the previous three chapters, the identities of the sales managers and the customers are mainly analyzed in the gifting context, corruption context, and interaction context. Within each context, the sales managers are trying to construct different aspects of context-sensitive identities. In this chapter, another context is chosen for analysis: a helping incident, where sales managers draw on discursive resources of undirected reciprocity for emotional relational self and directed reciprocity for instrumental anti-relational self. Here, by the term ‘undirected reciprocity’, I mean the individual who reciprocates the favour that he/she receives from the other person, but without expecting another reciprocity from this person again. Directed reciprocity means the individual reciprocates the favour with expectation of further reciprocity from the person doing the favour.

This chapter will begin with a brief introduction of the background of the helping incident, then follows with the construction of the undirected reciprocal aspect of emotional relational self; later, it continues with the construction of the directed reciprocal aspect of instrumental anti-relational self; finally a summary of the chapter is given.

### **9.1 Background of the Incident**

This helping incident occurs prior to my arrival in the company, but one episode of the incident occurs during my observation in the office setting. I then interview the

manager: Hu who is involved in this incident. Stories about this incident are therefore narrated by him.

One day Hu makes a telephone call to a customer: Zhang and then gives the customer his bank account details to make the payment to his personal account. I am surprised why the payment of the purchase from the customer is made to Hu's personal bank account, rather than the company's business account. I raise my question to Hu. Hu explains that it is a customer who just wants to try out the product and therefore makes a small amount of purchase. Since the amount of money is little, around 250 pounds, he makes the payment to the company with his money. That is why the money is paid to him rather than the sales company. It is a customer Hu is very familiar with and with whom he has been in touch consistently for the last few years. But no business deal has been done between them in these years and this is the first one between the two.

According to Hu, the customers of the company could be divided into two types: those who target the domestic market and those who target the international market (mainly developed countries) for exporting purposes. There is a radical difference between these two types of customer. For the domestic types, an emphasis on cost and price are the leading factors for supplier goods. While for the international market, due to the higher levels of supervision and requirements from the developed countries, an emphasis is placed upon qualities of the supplier goods. The price-sensitive nature of the concern of the first type of customer makes it difficult to sell the product to them. The sales company is a trading company, though they claim that they are the producers. Their products are mainly bought from other domestic Chinese producers and then they are re-sold to their own customers. In this case, the unit price of products in the sales company has to be much higher than other suppliers in the

market to allow profits. It puts the sales company in a very difficult situation. This customer of Hu happens to be one targeting the domestic market. Thus, in the past few years, though they have been very familiar with each other, no business deal has been achieved between the two.

According to Hu, in the past few years, he has kept making phone calls to him and Hu has kept visiting him regularly whenever he is on business trip near the customer's location. Though no business deal is reached, they become very familiar with each other. Though the product the customer needs is much more expensive from Hu than from their existing suppliers, the customer still purchases some from Hu. Hu does not ask for payment immediately, but makes the payment by himself first and asks for the money later. It is under this context that the incident happens. Analysis of the narratives by different sales managers found that this type of incident in the form of helping the customers happens to every sales manager. The reason to choose this incident involving Hu is: firstly, it is an incident that I partially witness; secondly, it is an incident which is an immediate context where intensive use of identity metaphors and their collocating metaphors of the undirected reciprocal and directed reciprocal aspects of identities emerge; thirdly, it offers an immediate context as a point of departure to analyze the two aspects of self together; and fourthly, since the two aspects of self are mainly resolving around the theme of favour and reciprocity, the inter-relatedness of this incident with other incidents provide a chance to illuminate the self construction in the flow of favour and reciprocity within these incidents, and during a long period of time.

Therefore the two aspects of self are not going to be analyzed within one single and independent incident, since the incident is an episode within a series of interrelated sequenced incidents between a sales manager and several different but interrelated

customers who are all in a web of relationships. The flow of favour and reciprocity is going through one episode to another one in these series of incidents, going from one person to another one like an endless cycle.

When Hu talks about the incidents, he describes his interaction with the customers and also reflects upon his interaction with the customers. Two aspects of identities arise from these two immediate contexts: description of the interaction and the reflection on the interaction. In the next section, the aspect of identity construction in Hu's description of the interaction will be analyzed in detail.

## **9.2 Emotional Relational Self: Undirected Reciprocity**

In this incident of helping the customers, favour and reciprocity is a dominant theme for this incident. In Chinese interpersonal relationships, favour and reciprocity are always inter-related. Reciprocity as a norm is considered to be the basis of the interpersonal interaction within the Chinese society (Yang 1957). Different levels of familiarity in the relationships assume different levels of reciprocity between each other and the norm of reciprocity will operate in considerably different ways as well. Reciprocity and favour is closely related to the idea of face in Chinese culture, which appears also in the data for all the sales managers. In this incident and other related incidents, Hu constructs himself as an undirected reciprocal manager. Hu's undirected reciprocal self will be analyzed through the following aspects: firstly, the relationship construction between the sales manager and the customer through the metaphoric identities, since the relationship type determines the level of reciprocity (Hwang 1987); secondly, reciprocal self and the emotional attachments: renqing; thirdly, the reciprocal self and face work; and fourthly, the reciprocal self and the propriety: Li.

### 9.2.1 Relationship Construction and Metaphoric Identities

In this incident, a very good friendship relationship is constructed here. The customer is addressed as 'good friend' to the sales managers. This relationship places both of them in the realm of non-kinship types within the five hierarchical relationships. Also, this relationship belongs to the mixed type of relationship in Hwang's (1987, p. 136) categorizations. While Chinese society is a familistic society, many non-family relationships are patterned after the family system (King 1985). The non-kinship relationships, 'though not family relationships, are conceived of in terms of the family' and 'the relationship between friend and friend is stated in terms of elder brother and younger brother' (King 1985, p. 58). Echoing this literature, the customer is also addressed as an 'elder brother' by Hu, as the narrative from Hu shows:

*Hu: we are very very familiar with each...could address him elder brother...*

In the Chinese society, in order to maintain interpersonal harmony, reciprocity is considered as a basis for social relations and return is expected when favour is done for others (Yang 1957). The norm of reciprocity is shaped by the 'hierarchically structured network of social relations (guanxi) in which people are embedded' (Hwang 1987, p. 944) and thus is applied differently in different relationships. For the mixed type of relationship constructed here: friendship, a culturally specific norm of reciprocity: renqing is applied (Hwang 1987). Hu's undirected reciprocal self construction is unavoidably influenced by it. Both renqing and reciprocity will be discussed in the next section.

### 9.2.2 Favour and Reciprocity: *Renqing*

This incident is about helping and reciprocity, as discussed in section 3.4, reciprocity and *renqing* are closely related. *Renqing* could not be directly translated into favour, since it entails four aspects of meanings: firstly, 'it means a human feeling-the basic emotional responses of an individual in confrontation with various daily life situations' and 'requires that one have an understanding of others' emotional responses in accordance with his or her own'; secondly, it 'indicates a set of social norms and moral obligations' in social interactions; thirdly, it is understood 'as a kind of resource, such as a favour or a gift, and can be used as a medium of social exchange'; and fourthly, it 'is used as a synonym for Guanxi' in certain contexts (Yan 1996, p. 122). Based on these meanings, I place the construction of undirected reciprocal aspects into four different categories: emotional, material, face-giving and moral.

#### 9.2.2.1 Materially Undirected Reciprocity

One of the meanings of *renqing* is favour in social exchange and this meaning results in a materially reciprocal self of Hu in the interaction with the customer. In the helping incident, after years of contact, Hu and the customer become very good friends. The customer finally makes a symbolic amount of order from Hu. This order is regarded as an act of doing a favour for Hu, since the customer has to suffer some loss due to the much higher price of Hu's trading products. The customer's order is regarded by Hu as a *renqing*, as shown in his narrative:

*Hu: because I have already visited him for many times, but our products are much more expensive than other competitors...after so many times of visits, there is still no business between us, he feels embarrassed. So he make a small amount of symbolic*

*purchase, our price is too high... it is impossible for him to order a huge quantity. Since he got the Xin, the Qing, then I need to have the Yi ...he is merely giving me a renqing... for me, then I will tell him to use the products first and not to worry about the payments...he does me a renqing, I do him a renqing as well.*

In this narrative, Hu's trading products are unavoidably much more expensive than the price of the products of the current, self-producing suppliers for the customer. The purchase of Hu's products, no matter how small the amount is, will cause loss of profit on the side of the customer. At the same time, such a small amount (around 10kg) is unlikely to generate profit for Hu either. However, the customer still chooses to make the order and Hu is very happy about it. He sees it as a *renqing* favour from the customer. For this favour, though a very small and possibly unprofitable order, Hu reciprocates by offering the products right away without payment of deposits. As a rule, the customers would need to pay 50% of the total money as a deposit before the product delivery and an immediate 50% payment after they receive it.

Customers always request a longer period of payment after they receive the product. Only those customers with a large quantity of purchase would be given this extra period of time. In this incident, the customer is disqualified from being given any extended period of time for the payment. However, Hu violates the rule of the company: he delivers the product without deposit to reciprocate the favour. After he delivers the product, he makes the full payment using his own money in order to give the customer an unlimited amount of time to settle the payment, just as he says: '*he does me a renqing, I do him a renqing as well*'.

An undirected reciprocal self of Hu is therefore constructed materially through the exchange of favour between each other. However, the reciprocity does not end here. Hu's favour to the customer is not an equal return of the customer's favour, since 'a

repayment of merely equivalent tends to end an ongoing *guanxi*' and it is important to 'keep the other indebted'(Yang 1994: p. 143 ). For such a small purchase, the customer receives not only a better treatment than those customers with key accounts, but also a unique treatment: Hu pays the money first and leave great leeway for the customer, as Hu comments on his unbalanced return of the favour:

*Hu: 别人敬你一尺, 你要还别人一丈嘛,*

*w-f-w T: others-respect-you-one-inch, you-must-return-others-a-foot.*

*DT: others respect you an inch, and you must respect others a feet.*

*IT: 'You honor me with a foot; I honor you with a yard' (Yang 1994: p.143)*

Here, an indirect translation is quoted from Yang (1994). This unbalanced amount of favour return helps to extend the debt, makes the customer indebted to Hu again and allows the chance to further cultivate the relationships (Yang 1994). Though the reciprocity is unbalanced for people who intend to prolong the relationship, in the long run, it is necessary to be in a balance (Yang 1957). Favour needs to be returned, though not immediately and could have an interval in between. After a short interval, Hu's customer tries to repay the favour through introducing three customers in three other companies to Hu. Two of them did not make any purchase due to the high price, but the third one makes an order though he finds the price much higher. This third customer actually also owes a favour to Hu's customer and also tries to repay the favour in this way. The flow of favour is going from one person to another one; the unbalanced reciprocity among these people forms an endless circle of indebtedness. Hu engages in this circle of relationship and the flow of favour and, constructs a reciprocal self through favour as well.



### 9.2.2.2 Emotionally Undirected Reciprocity

Hu's undirected reciprocal self is not only materially constructed, but also emotionally constructed through the favour as well.

As stated previously about the meaning of *renqing*, it is also an emotional response of an individual (Yan 1996, p. 122). Hu's undirected reciprocal self regulated by *renqing*, also shows an emotional aspect as well. This emotionally undirected reciprocal self is mainly manifested linguistically through three Chinese words: *qing*, *yi* and *xin*, which will be analyzed in turn.

*Qing* in Chinese means: 'a) feeling, affection, sentiment; b) love; and c) passion' in the dictionary. Combined with another Chinese word *ren*, it becomes the set phrase discussed here: *renqing*. *Ren* means human beings in Chinese. So the two words together literally mean: human feelings. It is a natural feeling which distinguishes humans from animals.

In the incident, Hu comments on his help to the customer as a return of *renqing*, making the customer emotionally feel indebted to him as well:

*Hu: Make him owe you a renqing.....Chinese people are afraid most of owing others renqing*

Hu's favour to the customer is constructed as a human feeling *renqing*. The verb 'owe' appears twice here and signifies the necessity of the reciprocity in the relationships. It has to be returned by the receiver. Failure to reciprocate will be considered as a lack of *renqing*, this is not only on the material level, but more importantly on the emotional level. It is 'tantamount to saying that he or she does not exhibit the natural affect and feelings of attachments and obligations to other people' (Yang 1994: p. 68)

This emotional reciprocity could be manifested through the use of the other two words: *yi* and *xin*. *Yi* means sentiment as well, like *qing*. *Xin* is usually translated as ‘heart’ in English, but it actually covers meanings of the heart and the mind in English (Sun 1991). Three of them co-occur together in this narrative:

实际上别人有那个心，那个情，那我肯定也要有那个意，

*w-f-w T: actually-others-got-the-heart (Xin), the-affection (Qing), then-I-surely-too-must-got-the-affection (Yi).*

*WM: Xin: 1. the heart 2. Heart; mind; feeling; intention; 3. Centre; 4.the fifth of the twenty-eight constellations into which the celestial sphere was divided in ancient Chinese astronomy (consisting of three stars in Scorpio).*

*Qing: 1. feeling, affection, sentiment 2. Love, 3. Passion*

*Yi : 1.meaning, idea 2.wish, desire, intention 3.anticipate, expect 4. suggestion, hint, trace.*

*DT: Actually others got the heart, the sentiment, I need to got the sentiment.*

*IT: actually others show me the heart, the sentiment, I need to show him the same kind of sentiment.*

This narrative occurs when Hu talks about his return of the customer’s favour. The customers’ favour is constructed as a *qing* and his reciprocity is a *yi*. These two words are synonyms. Very often they are used together as a set phrase to refer to an intensified affection as: *qingyi*. *Qing* and *Yi* indicate affection and emotion both as individual words and as a set phrase. *Xin* also means feelings and intentions. *Xin* used with *qing*, constructs an intentional emotion from customers. The *qing* of the customer is equated to the *Yi* of the sales managers. Without the use of the word ‘*renqing*’, the emotional reciprocity is constructed here through the use of synonyms. While ‘*renqing*’ implies obligatory reciprocity, *qing* and *yi* are totally free from this

association of reciprocity. The notion of reciprocity is cleverly embedded subtly in the paralleling synonyms, and the emotions are foregrounded through these high emotional words.

Apart from the *qing* and *yi* phrases, the emotional reciprocal self is also reflected by many verb phrases of *xin*. As discussed, *xin* covers both the physical 'heart' and the 'mind' in the western sense (Sun 1991). In this context, *xin* is always used in the sense of 'mind' and refers to 'the location of the desires'; 'ideas', 'intentions', 'feelings' and 'tendencies' or potential behavior' (Munro 1969, p.74). In Hu's narratives about this incident, *Xin* is used in three different phrases: 'real *xin*'; 'with all my *xin* and got the *xin*'. These three phrases occur in the narrative in a sequence. The first two are authored by Hu to construct the nature of his emotions. In the first phrase, 'real' is used in the sense of genuine. As the narrative goes, '*let the customers feel your real xin*', emotions are constructed as genuine emotions and feelings. In the second phrase, '*I need to help him with all my xin*'. '*Xin*' indicates 'tendencies' 'potential behaviour'; 'with all my *xin*' constructs a maximum amount of genuine emotions in the maximum amount of help. In the third phrase, Hu constructs an emotionally reciprocal self: '*You got the Xin, I need to got the Xin*'. An emotionally undirected reciprocal self is constructed through: the use of the same emotional word: *xin*. In this narrative, an identical emotional attachment is constructed through the use of the same word: *xin* to construct their identical emotions. The sentence structures of the two clauses are parallel and identical; the pronouns 'you' and 'I' refer to the customer and the sales manager respectively, revealing reciprocity of the emotion. The emotion is flowing from one person to another person with the change of the pronouns.

Reciprocity as a norm in *renqing* is also indicated through modality. People ‘often categorize their attitudes and experience in terms of the way things might or must be, or might have been or must have been, other than they actually are or were’ (Hoye 1997, p. 40). Modality is about ‘notions of possibility, necessity, probability and the relationships which may be perceived to exist among them’(Perkins 1983, p. 6). In the Cambridge Grammar of the English Language, modality is defined as “centrally concerned with speakers’ attitude towards the factuality or actualization of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 173). Nine core linguistic modal verbs and three major categories of meaning of modality (permission/possibility/ability; obligation/necessity; volition/prediction) are listed out in the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber et al., 1999). In an analysis of Hu’s modal verbs used in his narrative of this favour incident, two modal verbs: ‘must’ and ‘need to’ co-occur frequently with the words indicating emotional reciprocity: ‘xin’, ‘qing’ ‘yi’, as shown below.

*I need to help him with all my Xin’*

*You got the Xin, I need to got the Xin’*

*He got the xin, the Qing, I need to got the Yi.*

*DT: others respect you an inch, and you must respect others a feet.*

These two modal verbs: ‘must’ and ‘need to’ are among the nine core linguistic modal verbs expressing modality and both of them fall into the meaning category of ‘obligation/necessity’ in the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber, et al., 1999). Reciprocity is expressed through the obligatory modal verbs, and the undirected reciprocal aspect of emotional relational self is constructed here as well.

### 9.2.2.3 Face-giving Undirected Reciprocity

The undirected reciprocal aspect of identity construction not only has an emotional and material aspect, but also a moral aspect. In this section this aspect of identity will be analyzed through: face (*mianzi*) and propriety (*li*), both of which are discussed in chapter 3.

In this incident, when Hu and other sales managers talk about their help given to the customers, only *mianzi* is used for face in the narratives. *Mianzi* is related to the social hierarchies, and it could be gained and lost. Both the customers and the sales managers give *mianzi* to each other and gain *mianzi* from each other. The following two narratives are about how the customers give *mianzi* to the managers and how the sales managers gain *mianzi* from the customer in the reciprocal help given to each other. The first narrative is from the helping incident of Hu and the second one is from Fu's narrative of his receiving help from his customer in the form of a business deal:

*Hu: I address him as elder brother....it is because I have visited many many times... he felt very embarrassed after many times of sales visit and no business deal is given to me, therefore he make a symbolic order from me...he is totally giving me a renqing, and place the order because of my 'mianzi'.*

*Fu: How could they not give you a mianzi?...they will give us a mianzi more or less...*

Within both of the narratives, the relationships with the customers are well established as 'brother relationship' for Hu and 'friendship' for Fu. People have obligation to help their circle of friends, family (Yang 1995) and the reconstructed relationships here place mutual obligations upon both of them. Therefore, after many times of sales visits, the customer 'feels embarrassed' not to order anything from Hu. A help is finally offered to Hu through a symbolic business order. This obligation is external and social, which could be revealed through the use of the social face: *mianzi*, by both

of the sales managers. As mentioned above, *mianzi* is a social face and stands for social prestige. The maintenance of *mianzi* needs the customer to 'act in a manner consistent with the requirements for maintaining his *mianzi*' (Ho, 1976: p. 873). Failing to meet the requirements and obligations would result in the loss of *mianzi* (Ho, 1976). Therefore, the customer's help to Hu meets the external obligations upon him. In this case, the customer's *mianzi* is maintained and Hu gains *mianzi* from the customer. If the customer fails to give a *mianzi*, it will be an act of slighting the manager, causing him to feel small and insignificant (Hu 1944). At the same time, the maintenance of *mianzi* needs reciprocity through 'a due regard for the *mianzi* of others' (Ho 1976). To reciprocate Hu's sales visit for the past years, the customer arranges a business deal for the *mianzi* of Hu. Since this concern for *mianzi* imposes a 'mutually restrictive, even coercive, power upon each member of the social network' (Ho 1976, p. 872), Hu is obligated to reciprocate this favour by offering a flexible way of payment to give the customer a *mianzi* implicitly as well. The same reason holds true for Fu's case.

There are instances when the customer gains *mianzi*, and the sales manager gives *mianzi*:

*Shen: You need to give him a status, business activity place a lot of attention on mianzi, you should drink a wine of 10 yuan, but you drink the one of 100 yuan, making him feel that you have a lot of respect for him.*

In the above narrative, another sales manager Shen narrates giving *mianzi* to the customer at a business banquet. The use of *mianzi* for face, instead of *lian*, emphasizes the social status of the customer. As noted in the literature, people who have high social status are said to have *mianzi* (Ho, 1976), while *lian* is a moral face and everyone is entitled to claim a moral face: *lian*. *Mianzi* needs to be recognized from

the external environment (Hu 1944), while *lian* depends on the internal morality of the person. This difference in the notions of face and the constant use of *mianzi* in the banqueting context links this to the Confucian hierarchies in interpersonal relationships. This hierarchy needs to be acknowledged and everyone should be in his or her proper place within the hierarchy. According to the hierarchy, the customer needs to be hosted with the wine worth 10 yuan (Yuan is the Chinese currency). However, a 10-times more expensive wine worth 100 yuan is offered to the customer. This should be offered to someone who obtains a higher position in the hierarchy. This replacement with a more expensive wine is recognition of a higher social status of the customer. The higher social positions lead to a higher social prestige and therefore the customers' *mianzi* is enhanced and gained from the managers.

The gaining and giving of face of both of the sales managers and the customers are resolving around the issue of *mianzi*: the hierarchy and the social status. Both of them engage in two acts: giving and gaining *mianzi*. Both of their *mianzi* is gained and maintained through the other one in the mutual help. Failing to reciprocate will result in the loss of *mianzi* of the other and oneself. Therefore, embedded within this endless flow of favour and reciprocity, *mianzi* is given and gained. A face-giving undirected reciprocal aspect of the sales managers' identities is therefore constructed.

#### **9.2.2.4 Ethical Undirected Reciprocity**

The undirected reciprocal aspect of self of Hu is also constructed as ethical and moral. This ethical undirected reciprocity is revealed through one of the Confucian ethical principles: *li*. *Li*, is usually translated as propriety in English. As one of the Confucian ethical norms, it regulates the social conduct of people in social relationships (Yang

1994). *Li* is realized as an ethical norm through the ethics of reciprocity in *Renqing* practices.

Whenever sales managers talk about their help offered to their customers, *li* is often mentioned and it is always used in a traditional proverb: *Li Shang Wang Lai*. In the helping incident, the help offered to the customer is constructed as an act of ‘*Li*’ by Hu, as shown in the following narratives:

Hu: 中国人讲究的是礼尚往来,是不是啊, 来而不往非礼也,

W-f-w T: Chinese-focus on-courtesy-value-come-go. Isn't it? Come-but-not go-is not-courtesy.

WM: courtesy-value-come-go: 1 courtesy demands reciprocity 2. Deal with a man as he deals with you; pay a man back in his own coin; give as good as one gets.

Come-but-not go-is not-courtesy: it is impolite not to reciprocate – one should return as good as one receives

DT & IT: Chinese focus on reciprocity, right? It is impolite not to reciprocate.

In the above narrative, two traditional Chinese proverbs are used, which are underlined in bold letters. Both of the proverbs originate from the ancient classics: Book of Rites, which lay out the requirements for propriety for interpersonal ethics in social relationships and have influenced Chinese people for thousands of years. A paragraph is shown below in which both of the proverbs appear:

*'In the highest antiquity they prized (simply conferring) good; in the time next to this, giving and repaying (bao) was the thing attended to. And what the rules of propriety (li) value is that reciprocity. If I give a gift and nothing comes in return, that is contrary to propriety; if the thing comes to me, and I give nothing in return, that also is contrary to propriety'*



(Li Ji (Book of Rite), 'Qu Li' 1989, Legge 1885 in Yang 1994, p. 1)

The two underlined translations correspond to the two phrases respectively. The first proverb means 'the system of propriety upholds the reciprocal interactions among people' (Yan 1996). From this piece of ancient writing about *li*, reciprocity is the fundamental principle for propriety as an interpersonal ethic. *Li* is realized through the mutual obligatory reciprocity with each other. Failure to reciprocate will result in not only a loss of propriety of the person, but more importantly a loss of morality and ethics of the person, since a morally good person interacts with others in a reciprocal way, which is 'characterized by the obligation of giving, receiving, and returning gifts in the long run' (Yan 1996, p. 123).

This propriety and reciprocity is reflected in the following narratives:

*Hu: you need to take care of the customer, help him to solve the problem. The customer is a person as well, he will feel that you are helping him, caring about him...  
Hu: you care about me, then surely I will reciprocate.... if you treat me well, I will treat you well...if you treat me badly, then I will treat you badly.*

Here, the propriety and reciprocity is constructed in the two parallel 'if' conditionals. The parallel sentence structures between the 'if' conditional and their main clause stress the mutual reciprocity. The identical adverbs used in the two 'if' conditionals and their relative main clauses also stress the mutuality of the reciprocity. In this narrative, the customer is constructed as 'a person' by Hu. In an analysis of other relevant narratives, it is found that 'be a person' is used a few times either to construct Hu or the customer' identity, as shown below:

*Hu: He feels that 'I give you a renqing, and you know how to be a person...you give me the products to use first without asking for anything'.*

Hu uses a direct speech of the customer to talk about his reciprocity being a sign of 'is a person'. The phrase 'be a person' could be traced back to the Confucian ethics for a person. The Confucian concept of person requires a person to know the *li*. Without *li*, a person could not be called a person. If someone is accused of 'not knowing how to be a person', 'it questions whether a person is morally worthy of being called human, whereas to behave according to renqing is to be a virtuous human, or 'to know how to act like a human'' (Yang 1994, p. 68).

The ethical reciprocal self is also constructed and represented through another Confucian ethical principle: *yi*, which is usually translated as 'righteousness' in English. It is an internalized social norm for people in interpersonal relationships as well.

In a narrative by another sales manager: Fu, *yi* is used when some of his customers offer to him help:

*Fu:* 他们讲哥们义气

*w-f-w T:* they-speak-brother-Yi-Qi. *Ge:* brother; *Men:* plural

*DT:* they speak about brothers' breath.

*IT:* they talk about the righteous code of brotherhood (Yang 1994: p. 140).

In the data, another word phrase appearing with renqing is '*Ge Men Yi Qi*' which is translated by Yang as 'the righteous code of brotherhood' (Yang 1994, p. 140). It is a Chinese saying often used when making a request for help. 'People do not feel right if they let someone down or if they do not live up to obligations' and among friends, where 'the sense of righteous code of brotherhood is strong', failure to help the other one would result in one 'being called 'lacking in brotherhood' (Yang 1994, p. 140). A

morally undirected reciprocal aspect of self is therefore constructed by the sales managers.

Drawing upon the discursive resource of undirected reciprocity, an undirected reciprocal aspect of the emotional relational self is constructed. In the next section, the instrumental anti-relational self will be explored. Drawing upon the discursive resource of directed reciprocity, a directed reciprocal aspect of instrumental identity will be explored.

### **9.3 Instrumental Anti-relational Self: Directed Reciprocity**

Within the same narrative, when Hu reflects upon his interaction with the customers, drawing upon directed reciprocity, a directed reciprocal aspect of the instrumental anti-relational self is also constructed.

In an analysis of the sales managers' reflection narratives about their helping incident, this directed reciprocal aspect of identity is constructed through calculation and conflict, which will be discussed below.

#### **9.3.1 Calculative Directed Reciprocity**

In the reflection narrative of the sales managers, most of them view their self construction as a calculative one. That is, especially apparent in Chen, Hu and Fu's narratives. This self is constructed through: the reconstruction of the relationships; the use of identity metaphors reflecting a calculative nature; and the metaphor collocation with the identity metaphors.

The Guanxi between the sales managers and the customers is explicitly reconstructed as calculative, rather than as being emotional, ethical friendship or brotherly relationships. For this calculative self, a win-win and return-oriented relationship is projected. Mutual benefits of the two parties are emphasized in a calculative way. An analysis of the metaphors used for the identity construction of the sales managers and the customers will reveal this calculative nature embedded in mutual benefits. The identity metaphors are summarized below for this identity construction:

<b>Metaphoric identity of sales manager</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity of customer</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
<i>Horse keeper</i>	<i>horse</i>	<i>Hu: Keep the horse for thousands of days, use it for one moment.</i>
<i>Fisher man</i>	<i>Fish</i>	<i>Fu: Throw the long line, catch the big fish.</i>
<i>Watermelon keeper</i>	<i>Watermelon</i>	<i>Chen: Keep it if it is a watermelon; don't keep it if it is sesame.</i>
<i>Sesame keeper</i>	<i>sesame</i>	<i>Chen: Keep it if it is a watermelon; don't keep it if it is sesame.</i>

**Table 12 Metaphoric identities of sales managers and customers in description of the helping incident**

The calculative directed reciprocity is reflected through a few linguistic features here. Firstly, the metaphors as adjacent pairs for the identity construction of both the sales manager and the customer reflect a win-win calculative relationship. Here, with customers constructed as animals (fish, horse), plants (watermelon, sesame), and managers implicitly constructed as humans (fishers, horse keeper, watermelon keeper and sesame keeper), four different identity pairs emerged for the sales managers and the customers respectively: fisher-fish; horse keeper-horse; watermelon keeper-watermelon; sesame keeper-sesame. A feature is shared by all these pairs: ownership. The customers are metaphorized as properties that could be owned by the sales

managers to generate profits. This ownership by the sales managers is further confirmed by active voice of the sentence and the verbs used for these pairs: 'keeping' and 'catch'. This is not only a profitable ownership for the sales manager only, but also a win-win relationship. They have a mutual dependence upon each other, one's survival depends on the other: animals and plants need to be taken care of by their owner, and the owner needs the animals and plants to make a living.

Another important feature of the calculative directed reciprocal aspect of self is return-oriented, which is revealed through the construction of time span in the above narratives. The help given to the customers is like favours, and return is expected. The instrumentality of the return needs to be masked with an interval of time between the giving of favour and the returning of favour, since making a request at the exact time favour is given is considered to be too obviously instrumental and calculative (Yang 1994). Thus, one needs to be cautious about the timing of the requesting a return of a favour and the favour needs to be given 'well in advance of making a request' (Yang 1994, p. 136). This time span for the return-oriented calculative self is revealed through the phrase of 'thousands of days' to describe the time span before the return comes.

Another Chinese saying is also used to indicate the time span by Fu:

*Fu: 再一个就是要放长线, 钓大鱼。*

*w-f-w T: another-is-to-throw-long-line, get-big-fish*

*WM: throw-long-line, get-big-fish: throw the long line to catch a big fish -adopt a long-term plan to secure something big.*

*DT: we need to throw the long line to get the big fish*

*IT: we need to adopt a long-term plan to secure big sales order.*

The above relates to another Chinese saying: ‘reminds people that being cautious and patient in cultivating social relations will often reap big rewards’ (Yang 1994, p. 136). It is also translated as ‘let the line out far and one catches big fish’ (Yang 1994). The line needs to reach the deep waters in order to catch the big fish, but time is needed in order for the line to reach the deep waters, and likewise, time is also needed to get the return of the favour (Yang 1994).

The returned-oriented calculative directed reciprocal aspect of self is also constructed through the quantification of the possible returns from the customers. The identity metaphors used here indicate the quantification: ‘watermelon’ ‘sesame’ and ‘big fish’. The amount of profit is symbolized through the physical size of the watermelon, sesame and fish. Watermelon is a thousand times bigger than a sesame seed in terms of size. Here, contrasted with sesame, only those customers who could bring returns as big as a watermelon deserved the sales managers’ help. In the same way, the adjective ‘big’ indicates the amount of return the customers could bring: only big fish are worth the attention.

The third feature that reflects the calculative directed reciprocal aspect of self is the reconstruction of *renqing* favour and *mianzi* given to the customers. The emotional and ethical aspects of *renqing* and *mianzi* are totally denied by the sales manager. *Renqing* is reconstructed in a commercial sense of ‘buying and selling’. The making a purchase by the customer is constructed as a commercial act, as the narrative shows:

*Hu: he is purely giving me a Renqing, buy my mianzi, make a purchase from me, ...Then I sell him a Renqing. He sells me a Renqing, then I sell him a renqing as well.*

In Hu's helping incident, he sells a *renqing* to the customer to deliver the product. However, the little amount of the order brings no profits for this single transaction, and Hu's purpose is to attract more customers:

*Hu: the purpose is not to make money. It is to make friends with you and hope that you could bring me some profits one day.*

With such an agenda by Hu, the *renqing* favour is further reconstructed and metaphorized as a 'bait' to attract more fish (customers):

*Hu: it is like fishing, I feed you the bait, then hoping that you could bring more fish to me.*

The instrumental self has not only the aspect of return-oriented calculation, but also conflicts with the customers. In the next section, this conflicting directed reciprocal aspect of self will be discussed.

### **9.3.2 Conflicting Directed Reciprocity**

In this section, another aspect of the instrumental self will be analyzed: conflicting self.

The construction of the conflicting self will be analyzed through the following aspects: firstly, the conflicting relationships of the sales manager and the customers; secondly, the identity metaphors; thirdly, the reconstruction of the *renqing* favour offered to the customers.

Firstly, different from the calculation which is constructed within a win-win relationship, the conflict is constructed within a win-lose relationship. As in the calculative directed reciprocal aspects of self, friendship is totally denied, but its construction of friendship goes further in that their relationship is constructed as

'conflict of interest' based on gain and loss. The gain of one results in the loss of the other one in the relationship's equilibrium, as shown below:

*Shen: 'we could never become friends between each other...when there is a conflict of interest...who is friends with them?*

The non-coexistence and the conflicting nature of their relationships is further constructed through: 'fire' 'perish' in the following narrative:

*Shen: if you really treat him as friends, brother, you will perish... and I will fire you, you did not have your own standings then....*

The conflicting relationship is not only reflected through the explicit reframing of conflicts between each other, but also reflected through the contrast shown by the metaphoric identities for both of them.

Secondly, the conflicting directed reciprocal aspect of self is constructed through the metaphors used for the identity constructions of the two. Through two pairs of metaphors, the oppositions are further intensified and clearly pictured, as shown below:

<b>Metaphoric identity of sales managers</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity of customers</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
<i>Seller</i>	<i>Buyer</i>	<i>Shen: One is buying, the other is selling. Opposite standings, like the two poles of a magnet, complete opposite (to each other).</i>
<i>Negative magnet pole</i>	<i>Positive magnet pole</i>	
<i>Positive magnet pole</i>	<i>Negative magnet pole</i>	

**Table 13 Metaphoric identities of sales managers and customer in reflection of the helping incident**



In this narrative, two pairs ofonyms are used for the identity constructions: 'buyer' and 'seller' which is implicated through 'buying' 'selling; 'positive magnet pole' and 'negative magnet pole'. The conflict is indicated through the use of theonyms: buying and selling; positive and negative. The gain of the buyer results in the loss of the seller. Within the same magnet, the two poles are opposites of each other.

Within the same narratives, the use of two pairs ofonyms, and the double use of the adjective 'opposite' intensify and foreground gradually the tensions and conflicts between the sales managers and the customers.

Thirdly, the conflict is reflected through the reconstruction of favour, *mianzi* and emotions. Favour is reconstructed as the 'lubricant' to ease the frictions between the sales managers and customers.

As noted in the literature, banquet-giving with propriety 'serve(s) to mask or mute the instrumental nature of the gift' (Yang 1994, p. 136). In this incident, a banquet with customers not only serves this function but also masks the instrumental purpose of the sales manager:

*Shen: make the customer feel that you are helping him...then you will become friends...actually you are helping yourself, your company.*

It is even further constructed as 'lubricant' to ease the tensions with the customers:

*Shen: both parties need some **lubricant**... business in nature is something achieved by human and human.... a get-together would become a lubricant for the Guanxi of both parties,*

*Shen: Business banquets become a lubricant for the relationships of both parties...they will be closer to each other*

At the same time, *mianzi*-giving in the banquet is also denied. As pointed out previously, in the banquet, '*mianzi*' needs to be given to the customer through ordering expensive wines to show respect to the customers. Here, *mianzi* disappears and respect is reconstructed as a 'trial' to 'test the customers' attitude for the business deal:

*Shen: this is a trial of attitudes between each other.*

Doubt and opposition between them is presupposed through the use of these two words. Instead of constructing emotions, distance is constructed. The emotional words disappear totally in the reflection narratives; distance is constructed and stressed, as the following narrative shows:

*Shen: this is only for the communication convenience on the surface, but you need to keep some distance in your heart...you could not be a real brother to him...*

The conflict is constructed in the reflection narratives through the reconstruction of the relationship, metaphoric identities, favour, *mianzi* and emotions. Oppositions and conflicts dominate the reflection narratives and a directed reciprocal aspect of instrumental anti-relational self is achieved.

#### **9.4 Summary**

In this chapter, the undirected reciprocal and directed reciprocal aspects of identities are analyzed in an incident of helping. For the undirected reciprocal aspect, it draws

upon the discursive resource of undirected reciprocity. For the directed reciprocal aspect, it draws upon the discursive resource of directed reciprocity.

It is found that for the undirected reciprocal aspect of self, a good friend relationship and kinship relationship are constructed between the sales manager and customers. This aspect of self is characterized by four different aspects of constructions: emotional, material, face-giving and ethical.

It is also found that for the directed reciprocal aspect of identity, an ownership relationship and a conflicting relationship are constructed between the sales managers and customers. This aspect of identity is constructed in two different ways: calculative and conflicting.

In the next chapter, I will summarize all the aspects of identities found in the two meta-identities. Then I will move on to discuss the three types of relationships among these identities: antagonistic, intertwining and disguising.

## Chapter 10: Discussion: Relationships of Identities

After analyzing the four aspects of identity constructions of the sales managers in the above four chapters, this chapter will be discussing the relationships among these identities. These identities relate to each other in three different ways: antagonistic, intertwining, and disguising. This chapter will begin with a summary of the different identities in the previous data analysis chapters. After that, I will discuss the antagonistic relationships, then the intertwining relationship and finally the disguising relationship.

### 10.1 Summary of the Identity Constructions

In the previous chapters, the sales managers' various aspects of contextual identity constructions are analyzed within four different incidents, as summarized in the following table:

<b>Context</b>	<b>Discursive Resources for Emotional Relational self</b>	<b>Discursive Resources for Instrumental Anti-relational self</b>	
Ritualised Gifting	Familism	Anti-familialism	
Corruption Gifting	Ethics	Anti-Ethics	
Communicating	Conformity	Adaptability	
Helping	Undirected Reciprocity	Directed Reciprocity	Calculation
			Conflict

**Table 14 Contexts and discursive resources for the construction of emotional relational and instrumental anti-relational self**

As shown in the table, two different sets of identities are constructed by the sales managers. These identities are very much context-sensitive. When interacting with the customer, an emotional relational self is constructed by the sales managers. When reflecting on their interaction with the customers, an instrumental anti-relational self is constructed by the sales managers. These two identities stand in complete contrast with each other. Since they are context-sensitive, four incidents, where the metaphoric identity constructions heavily cluster together, are chosen to further analyze the two sets of identities. Within each incident, the two different aspects of these two identities are constructed, drawing upon different discursive resources. When describing about the incidents of: ritualised gifting, corruption gifting, communicating and helping, an emotional relational self is constructed drawing upon four different discursive resources: familism, ethics, conformity and undirected reciprocity. While reflecting upon these incidents, an instrumental anti-relational self is constructed drawing upon discursive resources of: anti-familism, anti-ethics, adaptability and directed reciprocity. These various aspects of identities drawing upon these various discursive resources are related to one another in various different ways, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## **10.2 Antagonistic Relationship**

The first way these various identities relate to each other is through antagonistic relationship. The two meta-identities are in oppositions to each other: emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self. Not only are the two meta-

identities in contradiction to each other, but also their different aspects of self are in contradiction to each other. Within each incident, the different aspects of these two meta-identities are in opposition as a result of their contradictory discursive resources: familism and anti-familism; ethics and anti-ethics; conformity and adaptability, undirected reciprocity and directed reciprocity. In this section, the antagonistic relationships of the aspects of identities will be analyzed through the following ways: the constructed relationships between the sales managers and the customers; the metaphors used for identity construction; the emotions constructed for both of them; and the collocating metaphors between them.

Firstly, the relationships constructed between the sales managers and the customers are always in opposition in the emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self, as shown in the following table.

<b>Relational self</b>	<b>Constructed Relationships</b>	<b>Anti-relational self</b>	<b>Constructed Relationships</b>
Familial aspect	Kinship; Romantic relationship; Friendship;	Anti-familial aspect	Fighting relationship; Contractual relationship;
Ethical	Partnership	Anti-ethical aspect	Money relationship
Conforming aspect	Superior-subordinate relationship; Kinship;	Adaptive aspect	Human-human relationship; Human-animal relationship; Human-unanimated object relationship;
Undirected Reciprocal aspect	Kinship; Friendship;	Directed Reciprocal Aspect	Ownership; Conflicting relationship;

### **Table 15 Relationship constructions for emotional relational and instrumental anti-relational self**

Within the different aspects of the self, different contradictory relationships are constructed between the sales managers and the customers. For the relational self, the relationship construction follows the five hierarchical relationships and shows a feature of closeness, and familism. Kinship as a dominant relationship appears in every aspect of the identity construction for the relational self. Second in importance is friendship which appears as a second dominant theme in familial and undirected reciprocal aspects of identity. Third in importance are the romantic relationship and the superior-subordinate relationship. All the four relationships fall into the five hierarchical relationships which are recognized as the most important relationships for a person in a Confucian culture.

In the case of the anti-relational self, the relationship construction shows features of opposition, distance and instrumentality. The opposition is shown through constructing a fighting and conflicting relationship in the emotionless and instrumental self. The distance is revealed through the three different relationship constructions in the adaptive aspect of self: human-human relationship; human-animal relationship; human-unanimated object relationship. Instrumentality is also revealed through the construction of contractual relationship and ownership in instrumental and emotionless self.

#### **10.2.1 Metaphoric Identity Construction**

Apart from the contradictory relationship construction in the different aspects of selves, an antagonist relationship is also shown through the metaphors employed for

the identity constructions of the selves. The following table summarizes the metaphors used for the identity constructions of the sales managers and the customers in different aspects of the selves:

<b>Emotional Relational self</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for sales managers</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for customers</b>	<b>Instrumental Anti-relational self</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for sales managers</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for customers</b>
<b>Familial Aspect</b>	Relatives	Relatives	<b>Anti-Familial Aspect</b>	Lamb keeper	Lamb,
	brothers	brothers		Human	Animal
	Family member	Family member		Enemy	enemy
	husband	wife		investor	financial investment product,
	boyfriend	girlfriend			
	Good friend	Good friend			
	Companion	companion			
<b>Ethical Aspect</b>	Business partner	Business partner	<b>Anti-Ethical Aspect</b>	Animal keeper	Animal, lamb
<b>Conforming Aspect</b>	Student	Teacher /expert	<b>Adaptive Aspect</b>	human	human; cow; thing, target, devil;
	Younger brother	Elder brother			



<b>Undirected Reciprocal Aspect</b>	Good friend	Good friend	<b>Directed Reciprocal Aspect</b>	Horse keeper	Horse
	brother	brother		Fisher man	Fish
				Watermelon keeper	Watermelon
				Sesame keeper	sesame

**Table 16 Metaphoric identities for sales managers and customers in the construction of emotional relational and instrumental anti-relational self**

Most of the metaphors used for the relational self derive from the relational pairs in the five hierarchical relationships: father-son; superior-subordinate; younger brother-elder brother; friend-friend. These identity pairs show a tendency towards relational closeness. The metaphors used for the anti-relational self show a clear distinction between the sales manager and the customer. With the sales manager being the human category, and customers being mainly animals category and unanimated object category, a distance between them is shown. The closeness shown in the relational self and the distance shown in the anti-relational self contribute together to the antagonistic relationship.

### **10.2.2 Construction of Emotionality**

The third feature of the antagonistic relationship is the antagonistic emotion constructions in the relational and anti-relational self. In the relational self, strong emotional attachment is constructed between the sales managers and the customers. However, in the anti-relational self, emotional attachment is denied and reconstructed into instrumentality.

In the relational self, emotional attachments are presupposed in the use of the metaphors for the identity construction. As analyzed in the previous chapters, the construction of emotion could be revealed through a few words of high emotions. In the construction of the three aspects of the relational self, words of high emotions are used, especially three Chinese words: *xin*, *qing* and *yi*. They are either used alone or with other phrases to construct the emotions. *Xin* is used with many other words, expressing different degrees of emotional intensity in the constructions of relational self, as summarized in the following table.

<b>Word phrases of <i>Xin</i></b>	<b>Literal translation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Xin</i>	Thoughts from the heart	Thoughts
<i>Xin Ling</i>	Heart and soul	In the heart,
<i>Xin Sheng</i>	Voice of the heart	Heart-to-heart talk
<i>Ba Xin Da Kai</i>	Open your heart	Honest
<i>Jiao Xin</i>	Exchange heart	Honestly, frankly
<i>Xin Tai</i>	Heart attitude	Attitude,
<i>Xin Zhong/ Xin Li</i>	In his heart	In his heart, in his mind
<i>Xin Yi</i>	Regards from the heart	Heartfelt thoughts, greetings
<i>Jiang Xin Bi Xin</i>	Compare one's heart with the other's heart	Treat the others in the way that you are being treated
<i>Guan Xin</i>	Care of the heart	Take care of someone
<i>Zhi xin</i>	Knowing one's heart	Knowing each other deeply

**Table 17 Summary of word phrases using *xin* to express emotional intensity**

*Xin* is used in conjunction with other words and acquires different contextual meanings. All the meanings are emotion-laden. They implicitly or explicitly refer to attitudes or the behaviour of the sales managers towards the customers. As mentioned

previously, *xin* covers the physical heart and the mind; the use of *xin* to construct the emotional attachment in the mind, is revealed in the first eight word phrases of *xin* in the table. *Xin* is used with other words to construct an internal honesty and frankness of the mind of the sales managers, while the last three word phrases, refer to the external behaviours of the sales managers governed and regulated through this internal honesty and frankness, e.g. compare one's heart with the other's heart.

The other two emotion-laden words are *qing* and *yi*, expressing affect and emotion. The use of these two words in the construction of relational self is frequent. At the same time, they are used together with *xin*, expressing an intensified emotion, as the narrative shows:

*He got the xin, the qing, I need to got the yi.*

Hu's construction of reciprocal self is reciprocating his *yi* for the *qing*, the *xin* of the customer.

Contrary to the high emotions in relational self, these emotional attachments disappear or are denied in the anti-relational self. *Xin* is used again, but expressing distance and defence, as summarized in the following table.

Word phrase of <i>Xin</i>	Literal translation	Meaning
<i>Jie Xin</i>	Hearts on guard	Being defensive of
<i>Xin Li Ju Li</i>	Distance between the hearts	Emotional distance

**Table 18 Summary of word phrases using *xin* to express emotional distance**

*Qing* and *yi* mainly disappear from the anti-relational self. There are a few instances of appearance, but mainly used with ‘fake’ to negate the emotions, e.g. ‘fake *qing*’ and ‘fake *yi*’.

The denials of the emotional attachment in the anti-relational self and the constructions of it in the relational self form an antagonistic contrast between each other.

### 10.2.3 Collocating Metaphors

A final feature of the antagonistic relationship between the relational and anti-relational self is shown through the metaphors which are in collocation with the identity metaphors. In the construction of the self, different metaphors are used, together with the identity metaphors. These collocating metaphors are used in different situations, recontextualizing the situations of contradictory natures, as the following table shows.

Situations	Relational self	Anti-relational self
<b>Negotiation</b>	Negotiation	martial arts, massage, Taiji
<b>Corruption</b>		free lunch, lamb wool,
<b>Banquet</b>	Get-together	lubricant
<b>Compliments</b>	Communication	1 million, wood, fire, devil’s language
<b>Recommending products</b>	Service	Syndrome, prescription, cake, biscuit,
<b>Developing Guanxi</b>	Love at first sight,	Quick war , city wall, army, drumming,

**Table 19 Summary of the situations in which collocating metaphors are used**

These collocating metaphors are mainly used in the construction of anti-relational self and cluster around six different situations. When these situations are being talked about in the construction of relational self, they are being talked about in business terms, except the last one. When talking about how to develop a Guanxi with the customers, it is compared to the way of chasing after a girl. Therefore, sometimes the Guanxi establishment could be as quick as 'love at first sight'.

In contrary to this metaphor of love, in the construction of anti-relational self, different metaphors are used. Developing guanxi quickly is compared as a quick war between the two and barriers in this process are like city walls blocking people's entry to the city. 'Army' and 'drumming' in the fighting process are used. In line with the fighting theme, skills in the business negotiation are compared to the skills in martial arts, massage and *Taiji*. Banquet is a 'lubricant' to ease the tensions between the sales managers and the customers.

Corruption is reconstructed as a money-dominant event with the use of 'free lunch' and 'lamb wool'. Compliments and recommendation of the products are both reconstructed from an instrumental and practical perspective. Giving compliment is like giving '1 million', like 'adding wood onto fire'. Recommending products to customers is like 'prescribing the right medicine for the right syndrome'.

The highly emotional nature of the collocating metaphors in the relational self is in sharp contrast with the highly instrumental, practical and monetary nature of the metaphors in the anti-relational self.

In view of the relationships, the emotions and the collocating metaphors in relational self and the anti-relational self presented above, an antagonistic relationship is formed between them.

### 10.3 Intertwining Relationships

A second relationship that is formed among the different identities is an intertwining relationship. In this section, the intertwining relationships among the four aspects of the relational self and the intertwining relationships among the four aspects of the anti-relational self will be discussed first. Then the intertwining relationships between the two identities are discussed later.

#### 10.3.1 Intertwining within Identities

For the relational self, the constructions of the familial, conforming and undirected reciprocal aspects are intertwined together within the same narrative and the same relational self construction. This intertwining relationship could be revealed through two features: the metaphoric relationship construction between the sales managers and the customers; and the metaphoric identity construction of both of them.

Though different metaphoric relationships are suggested with the customers, one metaphoric relationship construction is shared by three aspects of identity construction: kinship relationships, as shown below:

Emotional Relational self	Constructed Relationships
Familial Aspect	<i>Kinship</i> ; Romantic relationship; Friendship;
Conforming Aspect	<i>Kinship</i> ; Superior-subordinate relationship
Undirected Reciprocal Aspect	<i>Kinship</i> ; Friendship;

**Table 20 metaphoric relationship construction shared by three aspects of identities: familial, conforming and undirected reciprocal**

Corresponding to the kinship relationship, different metaphoric identities are constructed for both the sales managers and the customers. A metaphoric identity pair is further shared by the three aspects of relational self: brother-brother, see below:

<b>Relational self</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for sales managers</b>	<b>Metaphoric identity for customers</b>
<b>Emotional self</b>	Relatives	Relatives
	Family member	Family member
	<i>Brothers</i>	<i>Brothers</i>
<b>Conformist self</b>	<i>Younger brother</i>	<i>Elder brother</i>
<b>Reciprocal self</b>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Brother</i>

**Table 21 The metaphoric identity used for kinship relationship construction in emotional, conforming and reciprocal aspects of identities**

Therefore, in the construction of a familial brother-brother relationship, the familial aspect, the conforming aspect and the undirected reciprocal aspect could be intertwining or overlapping within the same construction. In the interacting incident, the familial aspect is constructed through the younger brother- elder brother identity construction: the sales manager as younger brother and customer as elder brother. At the same time, a conforming aspect is constructed by adopting a listening-centred style of communication with the customers. The familial aspect and the conforming aspect are intertwining together.

For the anti-relational self, the anti-familial, adaptive and directed reciprocal aspects are intertwined together within the same identity construction as well. The intertwining relationship could also be revealed through the reconstructed

relationships and the metaphoric identities used. There are different relationships each of them metaphorically constructed, as shown below:

<b>Anti-relational self</b>	<b>Constructed Relationships</b>
Familial Aspect	Fighting relationship; Contractual relationship;
Adaptive Aspect	Human-human relationship; Human-animal relationship; Human-unanimated object relationship;
Directed Reciprocal Aspect	Ownership; Conflicting relationship;

**Table 22 Summary of the relationship constructions of instrumental anti-relational self**

From the table above, each of the aspects constructs different metaphoric relationships. Though the relationships are very different, there is some overlapping among them. Hu's incident of interacting with the customers again reveals this intertwining relationship shown in the overlapping of the metaphoric relationships. Here, Hu constructs an adaptive aspect of self when he reflects upon the relationships with each customer. Embedded in this adaptive aspect of identity construction, there are the constructions of anti-familial and directed reciprocal aspects of self as well.

In the interacting incident, Hu's construction of adaptive aspect of identity is featured by reconstruction of three types of distant relationships with the customers: human-human relationship; human-animal relationship; human-unanimated object relationship. Both the fighting relationship in the familial aspect and the conflicting relationship in the directed reciprocal aspect are embedded within the human-unanimated object relationship.

For the human-unanimated object relationship, an identity pair: 'human-target' is used. Through reconstructing the identities of the sales managers as humans, and the customers as targets (for the gun), an adaptive aspect of identity is constructed. The



sales managers as gunmen, need to be flexible to move their guns and positions in order to shoot the moving target. In this identity construction, an oppositional conflicting relationship is also revealed through this identity pair of gunman-target. The verb 'shoot' used in conjunction with the 'target' further intensifies the fighting relationship. The anti-familial and directed reciprocal aspects are constructed at the same time.

Apart from the fighting relationship, the ownership relationship in the directed reciprocal aspect is also embedded in the human-animal relationship for the adaptive aspect. In this incident, the sales manager is reconstructed as humans and the customer as cow. Sales managers need to be adaptive to the customer's interest and talk about the topics favoured by the customer. If not, then it is like playing the lute to the cow, and the cow could not appreciate it. In this adaptive aspect identity construction through the 'human-cow' identity pair, ownership is suggested between them. The customers are like cows owned by the sales managers who are like cow owners. A directed reciprocal aspect of identity is therefore assumed here through this ownership construction. The rejection of high emotional words and the instrumentality shown in the adaptive aspect also constructs the anti-familial aspect.

### **10.3.2 Intertwining across Identities**

Apart from the intertwining of the different aspects within the two identities, these two identities co-exist and intertwine together as well.

In the following narrative from the incident of helping, the emotional relational self and the instrumental anti-relational self are intertwined.

*Hu: You got the Xin, I need to got the Xin.*

*Hu: He got the Xin, the Qing, I need to got the Yi.*

In this incident, Hu talks about his reciprocating the favour given by one of his customers, who is like a brother to him. The above narrative shows the intertwining of the undirected reciprocal aspect of emotional relational self and directed reciprocal aspect of instrumental anti-relational self.

The directed reciprocity could be shown through the paralleling sentence structure of 'you got ..., (then) I got...'. The first clause functions as a conditional for the existence of the second clause; though no conditional linguistic marker 'if' is used. Through this explicit exchange activity, a directed reciprocal aspect of identity is constructed.

However, this is not an exchange of tangible material goods, but an exchange of intangible emotional attachment between the sales manager and the elder brother-like customer. This could be indicated through the use of the high emotion words: *xin*, *qing* and *yi*. In the first narrative, the same word: *xin* is used in the two clauses, signifying the exchange of the same emotions. In the second narrative, the first clause uses *xin* and *qing*, and the second clause uses *yi*. *Qing* and *yi* are synonyms. Thus the exchange activity here is about intangible feelings as well.

Therefore, in these two narratives about the helping incident, the emotional relational self and the instrumental anti-relational self are intertwined together.

#### **10.4 Disguising Relationships**

A third relationship that the identities formed is a disguising relationship. That is, the anti-relational self is disguised by the relational self. The different aspects of the anti-relational self are disguised by the counterparts in the relational self: the anti-familial

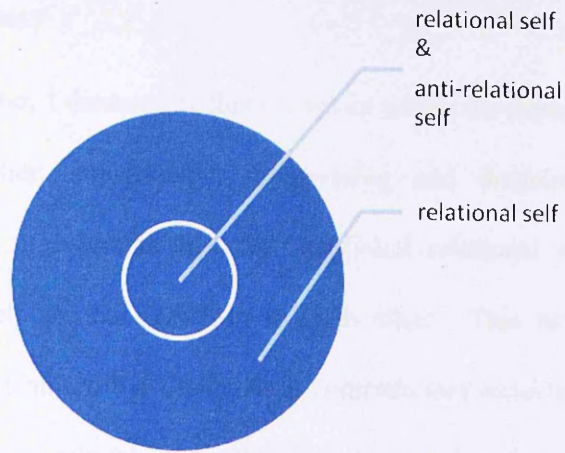
aspect is disguised by the familial aspect; the anti-ethical aspect is disguised by the ethical aspect; the adaptive aspect is disguised by the conforming aspect; the directed reciprocal aspect is disguised by the undirected reciprocal aspect.

The constructions of these many different selves are context-sensitive. In the spontaneous interaction with the customers, only the relational selves will be constructed and the anti-relational selves are always muted. When sales managers talk about their spontaneous interaction with the customers in the sales incident in front of the researcher, both of two different patterns of identity constructions emerge. Firstly, when they reflect upon and rationalize the interaction, the anti-relational selves are always constructed. Secondly, when the reflection involves some description of the interaction, the relational self is therefore constructed in the description as well, as shown below:

Context Identity of manager	In front of the customers: Interaction	In front of the researcher:	
		Description	Reflection
Relational self	X	X	
Anti-relational self			X

**Table 23 Summary of the emergence of relational and anti-relational self in two meta-contexts: talking to customers and talking to researchers**

In view of the three different contexts, though the two selves co-exist in the context of talking to the researchers, the identities are located within the two layers as suggested above and, as shown below:



**Figure 5 The emergence pattern of relational and anti-relational self in two meta-contexts: talking to customers and talking to the researcher**

In front of the customers, only the outer layer of the onion is seen by the customers: the layer of relational self, which focuses on emotional attachment, familism, ethics, conformity and reciprocity with the customers. The anti-relational self is never mentioned. Later, in front of the researchers, when this interaction is described and reflected upon, the inner layer of the onion is used: relational and anti-relational self. Though relational self is used to describe the interaction with the customers in front of the researcher, the relational self is immediately denied at the same time through an anti-relational self in the reflection narrative. The four aspects of relational self are replaced through the four aspects of identity construction in the anti-relational self.

Therefore, in front of the customers, a disguising relationship between the relational and the anti-relational self is formed. The anti-relational self is disguised by the relational self of the sales managers.

## 10.5 Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the three ways in which the aspects of identities could relate to each other: antagonistic, intertwining and disguising. For the antagonistic relationship, it is found that the emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self are contradictory to each other. This antagonism between the two identities is featured by, firstly, their contradictory aspects of identities: familial-anti-familial aspect; ethical –anti-ethical aspect; conforming-adaptive aspect; undirected reciprocal aspect-directed reciprocal aspect. Secondly, the identity metaphors used by these aspects of identities are contradictory. Thirdly, it also found that the construction of emotionality in the two aspects of identities is contradictory as well. Fourthly, the metaphors which collocate to these two identities and their aspects of identities are, furthermore, contradictory.

For the intertwining relationship, it is found that the different aspects within an identity are intertwined together. It also found that these aspects of identities are intertwined across the identities.

For the disguising relationship, it is found that the relational self always disguise the anti-relational self in the contexts of: actual interaction with the customers, and describing their interaction with the customers in front of the researcher. However, when reflecting upon their interaction with the customers in front of the researcher, an anti-relational self is used and the relational self is always absent.

In the next chapter, I will discuss my data analysis findings in the contexts of literatures. Contributions, implications, limitation and conclusion of the research will be discussed.

## **Chapter 11 Contribution and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I will discuss the four areas of contribution that this thesis has made. These contributions are mainly in the following four areas: discursive resources for identification; relationships among the identities; regulation and control of organizational members' identity through discourse; and a new analytic practice with focus on multi-lingual language data.

After that, I will move on to the discussion of the implications of this study for western managers and Chinese managers based on the gifting practice and communication practice; for policy maker based on the corruption incident; and for Guanxi research and research practice. Limitations and future directions for research will be noted later. Finally, the chapter concludes with the summary.

### **11.1 Contribution**

In view of the literature and the analysis results, there are four areas of contributions that this thesis has made. Firstly, challenging the current literature that organizational members' contradictory identities draw upon various contradictory discursive resources, this thesis offers a counter-intuitive finding that the various contradictory identities of an organizational member could draw upon a single discursive resource.

Secondly, this thesis addresses the current lack of research on relationships among identities in organization identity research, as claimed by Carroll and Levy (2008). Agreeing with the claim of Carroll and Levy (2008), this piece of research is conducted with a research focus on the possible relationships among the different selves. Echoing the findings of Carroll and Levy (2008) that the various identities

could be in a mutually constitutive relationship, it moves far beyond this rather simplistic and unitary way of conceptualizing the relationship and conceptualizes the mutually constitutive relationships in further detail as antagonistic, intertwining and disguising. This thesis extends the literature not only by showing three possible relationships, but also how the mutually constitutive relationship is well enacted and interwoven in these three relationships.

Thirdly, it questions the current literature that suggests organizational individuals are regulated and controlled by the discourses within an organization in order to have organizationally favourable outcomes. In contradiction to this mainstream argument about control, this thesis found that the organizationally favourable outcomes could be achieved through the regulation and control of the individual's identities by an extra-organization discourse, coming from outside the organizations. It therefore challenges the dominant practice of research on control in organization research by suggesting another form of control and subjectivity which also produces organizationally favourable effects.

Fourthly, this thesis breaks with the current analytical practice of overemphasis on the use of uni-lingual English language to deal with multi-lingual data by introducing an analytical practice from the discipline of linguistics, which is totally new to the field of organization studies. This new analytical practice focuses upon the originality and the culturally specific meanings of 'other language' data mainly through a triple translation method: word -for-word translation which translates the data word by word, or phrase by phrase; direct translation which translates the literal meanings of the data; and indirect translation which translates the deep meanings of the data. This triple translation method retains the originalities of the language in a much better way than the current practice of one-way translation. This method offers the possibility for

discourse analysts to explore the data in more depth, both culturally and linguistically. Therefore, this method, as a more helpful tool, broadens the current research practice both analytically and theoretically.

### **11.1.1 Singularity of the Discursive Resource for Contradictory Identity Constructions**

In this thesis, I have identified two contradictory identities: emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self. Drawing upon four different contradictory resources: familism and anti-familism, ethics and anti-ethics, conformity and adaptability, undirected reciprocity and directed reciprocity, four contradictory aspects of emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self are constructed by the sales managers. This research on identity construction therefore contributes to the identity literature in organization research by finding that identity constructions in organizations are not only coherent and fragmented, but also contradictory.

In the vast literature research, identity is viewed by some authors as unitary and fixed, as a coherent self-narrative (McAdams 1996, Worthington 1996), while others view identities as fragmentary and unstable (Gergen 1991, Gergen 1994). A lot of attention has been given to these two areas, especially the fragmentary identities (Collinson 2003, Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003). However, the contradictions within the identities are relatively under-researched, though it did not go unnoticed (Clarke et al., 2009, Musson and Duberley 2007, Whittle 2005). A common feature shared by these studies of contradictory identities is that the contradictory identities draw upon different and contradictory discursive resources. For example, Clarke et al. (2009) analyze three sets of mutually antagonistic discourse that managers in a large engineering company draw upon in their constructions of the self: emotional



detachment and emotional attachment; professionalism and unprofessionalism; concern for the business and concern for the people. In the same vein, Whittle (Whittle 2005) analyzes the contradiction management consultants face when producing the consulting discourse of flexible work for the customers and when they are practising it. Musson and Dubberley (2007) study the supervisors' response to the managerial discourse of participation and highlight the importance of three competing bases of identity formation that could be drawn upon.

This thesis backs up extant studies of identity fragmentation where findings show that identity constructions are contradictory and unstable in different settings. However, contrary to these studies which highlight that the multiple contradictory identities draw upon multiple contradictory discursive resources, my thesis shows that the two different contradictory identity constructions: emotional relational self and instrumental anti-relational self draw upon the two inter-related aspect of the same singular discursive resource: Guanxi. Since Guanxi consists of both an element of instrumentality and an affective emotional component: Ganqing (Gold et al., 2002), deriving from these two contradictory but related aspects, these two identities are constructed.

As noted in the Guanxi literature chapter, familism, conformity, and reciprocity are recognized as important features for the inter-personal relationships in Chinese culture, and ethics is an important cardinal virtue for the Confucian concept of person. These features are reflected in the emotional relational self. Drawing upon these features as discursive resources, four aspects of emotional relational self are constructed: familial aspect, ethical aspect, conforming aspect and undirected reciprocal aspect. Emotionality is also discursively constructed in these four aspects of identities. Contradictory to the emotional relational self, the anti-relational self reflects the

instrumental aspect of Guanxi and also involves four aspects of identity constructions: anti-familial aspect, unethical aspect, adaptive aspect, and directed reciprocal aspect. Instrumentality is further discursively constructed in these four aspects.

In view of the discursive resources developed in the respective aspects of identities, often identities point to the same socio-culturally embedded meta-discursive resource: Guanxi discourse. As a meta-discourse, the instrumentality and emotionality of Guanxi are drawn upon by the organizational individuals explicitly and implicitly in two different contexts to construct their identities. The sub-discourses: familism, conformity, and reciprocity, which are features of this meta-discourse, are drawn upon in local and context specific identity construction and therefore reproduce different discursive identities. These locally constructed identities are all drawn from the sub-discourse of the same meta-discourse: Guanxi, in contrast to the predominant findings in the literature where studies indicate that identities are constructed from multiple discursive resources.

### **11.1.2 Relationships between Identities**

The second contribution this thesis has made is the identification of several relationships among contradictory identities in an organization. As Carroll and Levy (2008) noted, 'relationship between selves and identities or organizations and identities have tended to dominate identity research to date, while the dynamics between identities are acknowledged but still under-theorized and –researched' (p.94). However, there are still some research attempts that provide some insights about the relationships among identities. For example, a mutually constitutive relationship is found in Carroll and Levy's (2008) paper. In their paper, the relationship between

management identity and the leadership identity is explored and a mutually constitutive relationship is found between these two identities: the understanding of one identity is made possible through the understanding of the other one. In a different setting from Carroll and Levy (2008), Esser and Benschop (2009, p. 403) study 'how female entrepreneurs of Moroccan and Turkish origin construct their ethnic, gender and entrepreneurial identities in relation to their Muslim identity'. The interrelationship of work identities with gender, ethnicity and religion identities are explored. These identities are found to be 'situationally, dialogically and dynamically constructed' (Essers and Benschop 2009, p. 418) and the process of identity construction is also through co-construction among the multiple identities. The same finding is echoed by Watson (2008, 2009a, 2009b) who explores the relationships of self-identities and socially available discourse and a dialectical process is assumed between social-identity and self-identity.

In view of the research attempts on the theorization of relationships among identities, both implicitly and explicitly, a similar theorization is made by these scholars: there is a mutually constitutive and dialectical relationship among the different identities in organizations.

In my data, a similar relationship is also found. There is a mutually constitutive and dialectical relationship among the different contextual identities constructed by the organizational members. As pointed out in the Guanxi chapter, Guanxi is a totality of two inter-dependent and mutually constitutive aspects: instrumentality and emotionality. In my data, the relational self and the anti-relational self draw upon these two aspects. Therefore, the relationship between these two selves reflects this mutually constitutive relationship.

However, my thesis advances the current understanding of the mutually constitutive relationships by showing the elements through which instrumentality and emotionality are constructed.

Firstly, an antagonistic relationship is found between the emotional relational and instrumental anti-relational self. The constructions of both identities involve four levels: the re-constructed relationship types; the metaphoric identities; the collocating metaphors with the metaphoric identities; and the construction of emotions. However, within each of the four levels, the two identities are in complete contradiction and opposition towards each other.

Secondly, an intertwining relationship is found in the process of the mutual construction of the relational self and anti-relational self. In the process of identity constructions, the construction of one identity is intertwined with the construction of the other one at the same time within the same narrative by the same author. That is, the same individual constructs two contradictory identities within the same self-narratives. The two contradictory identities sit beside each other in perfect harmony. My data shows this when the individuals describe what they do with their customers in front of the researchers. The individuals construct a relational self in their description of 'what they do with the customers', but simultaneously construct an anti-relational self when they reflect on 'what they do with the customers'. This intertwining relationship is not only found in the two contradictory selves, but also found in their own aspects of constructions. My data shows that within the two selves, the constructions of their aspects of selves are intertwined together. For the relational self, the familial, conforming and undirected reciprocal aspects are intertwined together through constructing the relationship with their customers as the same kinship relationship and the metaphoric identities as the family-oriented identities as

brothers with the customers. While the anti-relational self, the anti-familial, adaptive and directed reciprocal aspects of self are constructed at the same time through constructing the relationship with the customers as a fighting and conflicting relationship and the metaphoric identities as all sharing the same attributes of opposition and fighting.

Thirdly, a disguising relationship is found between the relational self and anti-relational self: the anti-relational self is disguised by the relational self. When interacting with the customers, the sales managers always construct a relational self; the anti-relational self is always absent, but not rejected in their narratives. However, while reflecting upon their interaction, the relational self is not only absent but also explicitly rejected by the same sales manager as not the 'real me' construction and an anti-relational self is in dominance. A context-sensitive emergence of the two identities sheds light upon the disguising nature of the relational self upon the anti-relational self.

To sum up, my thesis echoes the current literature on the theorization of relationships among identities that mutually constitutive relationship exists among the identities. The thesis extends this literature and further explores how the different identities relate to each other in different ways within the context of mutual construction. Three different relationships are found in my data: antagonistic, intertwining and disguising. The antagonistic relationship has also been implied in by the work of Clarke et al. (2009). In their work, the two contradictory identities only gain dominance in different contexts, but do not co-occur within the same narrative. That is, within one context and one narrative, only one identity is constructed. The two identities are in an either-or relationship. Differing from the work of Clarke et al. (2009), my thesis found that the two contradictory identities could co-exist in the same narrative. They relate to

each other as intertwining: one identity construct is interwoven with the identity of the other one within the same narrative; and as disguising: both co-exist, but the anti-relational self is disguised by the relational self.

### **11.1.3 Identity Regulation: Organizational Control Is Achieved by What Is Not**

A very important theoretical contribution my thesis makes is upon the areas of organizational control through discursive identity regulation. Specifically, it questions the concept of identity regulation proposed by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) which limits our understanding about control both theoretically and empirically. The thesis challenges the current dominant theorization between identity regulation and organizational control by showing empirically how organizational control is achieved through identity regulation not by drawing upon a management inspired discourse, but an extra-organizational discourse opposite to management discourse. This contribution my thesis makes will be discussed here with relevant literature and findings through the discussion of the regulated identities and the discourse that shapes the identities; the concept of control; the forms of control and the location of control.

Identity regulation as a result of organizational control is defined by Alvesson and Willmott (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, p. 619) as ‘how employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives’. In this thesis, how the organizational individuals construct their work identities and what discursive resources they are drawing upon are analyzed. Differing from most of the documented literature which analyzes identities in an intra-organizational context where the individuals are controlled by the

dominant organizational discursive practice, this thesis presents the identities construction in an inter-organizational context. That is, individuals construct their work selves both within the organization and outside the organization as required by their work.

This change of context and the consequent change of the availabilities of different discursive resources for the identity formation and regulations open up possibilities of counter-intuitive findings that this thesis claims here. Though within both contexts it is the individuals' work identity that is under construction, the work identities are constructed in an antagonistic way. In the intra-organizational relationship, the individuals are congruent with a lot of the studies in literature that an emotionless, profit-oriented self is constructed. This version of self is in congruence with the managerially defined objective in organizations. However, when the individuals are in another work context: an inter-organizational context, the individuals construct an emotional familial self towards their customers. This version of their work selves is in contradiction to the work identity with the managerially defined objective in organizations. This stands in sharp contrast with the current consensus in management literature that a preferred work self is aligned with the management-inspired discourse to achieve managerial objectives. What is more counter-intuitive is that this version of work self in the inter-organizational context, though in contradiction with the organizational discourse, achieves the managerial objective that the organizational discourse intends.

Therefore, while organizational control is accomplished only in the intra-organizational context and is a complete failure in the inter-organizational context; the managerial objective is fully achieved in both contexts. The findings contradict the current organizational control literature on identity regulation and offer a different

view on control and identity regulation. This thesis finds that the organizational control is accomplished through a non-organizational discourse: Guanxi discourse.

In the analysis chapters, the thesis shows that both versions of work selves draw upon the different aspects of the socio-cultural discourse of Guanxi for their identity construction. The instrumental aspect of the Guanxi discourse is coherent with the managerially defined discourse, producing an anti-relational self. The emotional aspect of the Guanxi discourse reflects a shared cultural understanding and a culturally appropriate conduct for people engaged in inter-personal relationships within which the inter-organizational relationship is embedded. The work identities constructed in both contexts are coherent with the two aspects of Guanxi discourse: emotionality and instrumentality. The relational self is manufactured by this emotionality aspect of Guanxi discourse and further reproduced as familial, conforming and undirected reciprocal selves. In contrast, the anti-relational self is manufactured by the instrumental aspect and further reproduced as unfamiliar, adaptive and directed reciprocal selves. Though contradictory, the anti-relational and relational self are mutually constitutive and co-exist in harmony within the totality of Guanxi. It is Guanxi discourse that regulates the identifications of the individuals work selves in various contexts.

In view of the analysis findings in this thesis, the contributions on identity, control and discourse are three-fold. Firstly, differing from the current literature which conceptualizes the individual as subjected to the organizational discursive practice, my data shows that organizational individuals are subjected to a non-organizational discourse and the organizational control is accomplished through non-organizational control. Contrary to the view in current research in organizations that organizational discourse is in control, my data shows that there are other forms of control exercised



implicitly and individuals become subjects to this form of control through appropriating their identity construction towards the discourse. This control is not from a discourse produced by the powerful organizational elites, rather it is a socio-culturally shaped discourse which shapes the ideologies and behaviour of the individuals in that language community, which also becomes a socially accepted practice. This socio-cultural discourse is so powerful that it is naturalized, legitimized in the daily interactive practices among individuals and becomes a code of interactive conduct for the individuals in and around the organizations.

This non-organizational discourse is more powerful than other organizational discourses in this local world of realities and counter-intuitively this non-organizational discourse also produces better organizationally appropriate individuals than the organizational discourse. The scope of this non-organizational discourse is, in effect, is greater than an organizational discourse. It produces profit-oriented individuals in the organization similar to that of the desired individuals encouraged by the organizational discourse. It also produces emotion-oriented individuals who bear strong Confucian identifications with others in an inter-organizational context, where the organizational discourse is not in effect.

Secondly, the thesis also locates control in a new context: an inter-organizational context, opening up new potential for further research. Current literature on discursive organizational control is very much limited in analyzing control and the identities within an intra-organizational context. This focus within the context of one organization precludes the possibility of analyzing the dynamics of control in an inter-organizational context where the individuals' work-identities are constructed. From the analysis of the various aspects of the two dominant identity constructions, the identities of the sales managers are dominantly controlled and regulated by the

Confucian Guanxi discourse both within and outside the organizational setting. The Confucian Guanxi discourse is reproduced in the sales managers' identities and the identities enhance the Guanxi discourse in the organizational and cross-organizational setting.

#### **11.1.4 Methodological Contribution**

This thesis also makes a novel methodological contribution to the analysis of multilingual data which has been neglected in the organization studies literature.

In the literature of organization studies to date, there is a strong focus on the unilingual language data: English. Even though some studies might be conducted, and the data collected, in a foreign language, there seems to be an agreed-upon practice of translating the data into English and performing the analysis upon the translated data in the English language. The greatest shortcoming for this way of dealing with the data would be: to neglect the originalities and the meanings of the source language on the semantic level; the loss of the contextual meaning which is largely bound up with the pragmatic level; and the loss of cultural-ideological meaning on the ideological level.

In the field of linguistics where the universals in language are the focus, the multilingual data have been widely explored and used in linguistic research. Different translation methods are used to deal with the translation issues from a foreign language the English language and to reduce the meaning loss in this translation process. Chinese data has been under analysis for a long time. Within the field of discourse analysis, a triple-translation method is quite often used by discourse analysts in their analysis of the Chinese data (Chiang and Duann 2007; Lu and Ahrens 2008).

Recognizing the great difference between the Chinese language and the English language, some discourse analysts adopt this triple-translation method to explore language in use in the Chinese language. With the same research purpose of researching language in use and the same language data, this triple-translation method is also adopted here. With a focus on the culturally specific and contextual meanings of the Chinese language data, this triple-translation method is further modified to fit into my data analysis. In addition to the three way translation, the meanings of the key individual Chinese characters are also provided: the different meanings of the same character are provided to give a holistic picture of meanings and the word meanings used in that specific context are underscored to provide the reader with the contextual meanings. This modification of the method is intended to further unpack the language in use and the specific meaning acquired in the context.

There are three main benefits of introducing this novel triple-translation method in the field of linguistics to the field of organization studies. Together with the three-way translation, three benefits are obtained. Firstly, on the semantic level, it focuses on the meaning potential and polysemous meanings: the individual meanings of each word are provided and the contextual meaning of this word used in the sentence is also highlighted.

Secondly, on the communicative functional or pragmatic level, the direct translation and the indirect translation highlight the communicative meanings and the pragmatic functions of the Chinese language data. Language is for communication and communication is made possible through language. How language is being used in the local context or the micro-context and how language performs this communicative function in the Chinese language is very different from the English language. Simply translating the data into English neglects this function, but just conveys the meanings

of the words. The direct translation shows how certain indigenous Chinese words are being used in the local context. The data show that many Chinese idioms and sayings are used by the sales managers. For example, the word 'xin' which means both heart and mind in English is often used. By translating this word simply into 'heart' in English, the communicative functions of the language are left out. The unitary and simplistic translation widely used in organization studies will neglect the richness of these words.

Thirdly, on the ideological level, this triple-translation method provides a deeper insight to tease out the politically laden words and phrases in the Chinese data, which will otherwise be neglected or missed in the current simplistic translation process.

Language use has power and ideological effects. The use of certain words is always political. Within the Chinese language system, different words convey different ideologies. While these words may be translated into the same English word, the ideologies embedded within these words would be lost in the translation. There are cases where certain political and ideological idioms are used in the business context, but for which the current translation practice fails to capture this intertextuality of the usage of languages. For example, 'sugar-coated bullet' is a highly political phrase used often in the Chinese Cultural Revolution by chair Mao and his followers. The simplistic translation leaves out the depth and the ideologically-bounded meanings of it.

Given the benefits obtained by more systematic translation, this method contributed to a better understanding of Guanxi. With the application of this translation method, I am able to convey largely both the surface level meaning and the the deep level meaning, to a large extent, through attending to meanings of individual characters and through

attending to the literal and metaphorical meanings of the characters at both levels. For example, I have been able to demonstrate the construction of a hierarchy through the systematic use of animal metaphors and to emphasize the different ways in which the idea of 'heart' is used. These aspects, in turn allow me to situate business relationships within the broader cultural context (through demonstration of how hierarchy is conceived) and show something of the intricacies of emotion use in doing Guanxi.

Because of this complex translation and interpretation process involved in this study, I was able to show the rich connotations and extensions of the characters, phrases, idioms, as socially agreed linguistic symbols in language use. Retaining the connotations and extensions of Chinese language, when studying Guanxi in Chinese terms, subsequently enriches the understanding of Guanxi and shows how it differs from 'relationship' in terms of its practices and cultural role. This is despite some more superficial similarities and the necessity to apply the English term because of the absence of a more complete alternative. Therefore, an understanding of sales work is inevitably inadequate if reading from the notion of 'relationship'.

Through this method, this study is able to extend the current understanding Guanxi through exploring the Chinese terms: renqing, ganqing and face (lian, mianzi) and by introducing their rich cultural and social connotations which are revealed through language. By doing this, it unpacks the concept of Guanxi internally and explores Guanxi in an interconnection of these theoretical concepts.

## **11.2 Implications for Western Managers and Chinese Managers**

Based on the analysis findings, implications could be pulled out from this study for both western and Chinese managers. These implications are not prescriptive in nature

and might not necessarily help improve the current practice. Rather they are intended as providing a new way of thinking for the business practitioners and a way to reflect upon what they are currently doing from a different perspective. By doing so, it might also provide a possibility for doing what they are currently doing in a different way.

Firstly, I would like to discuss the implications for western managers. In this study, Guanxi has been explored in four different contexts: gifting, corruption, communication and helping. Based on the table of summary about Guanxi in marketing research in Chapter 3, marketing research on Guanxi explores gifting and corruption in Guanxi. Guanxi in the contexts of communication and helping have not been explored yet in the marketing literature. The managerial implications I propose here are mainly categorized through these contexts. A checklist is provided within each context about what managers might encounter and what they might do in that context.

<b>Occasions of gift-giving</b>	<b>Types of gift</b>	<b>Value of gift</b>
<u>Ritualized occasions:</u> Chinese new year Mid-autumn festival Dragon boat festival Christmas	<u>Follow the festival rituals</u> Calendars; Red envelopes Mooncakes Zongzi (glutinous rice) E-card	Mainly low value gift
<u>Occasional gift:</u> Visiting a customer	<u>No set standard,</u> Often bring the local specialty to customers (e.g. biscuits, tea, wine)	Mainly low value gift
<u>Ceremonial gift:</u> Birthday, Weddings, New-born baby	<u>Follow the norms</u> Weddings: money given. Birthday: gift New-born baby: baby clothes	Mainly moderately priced gift Could be high-value; The stronger their Guanxi, the more expensive the

		gift should be
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**Table 24 A checklist of occasions, types and values of gift in gift-giving practice**

The Chinese gift-giving is highly contextual and personal. It involves many different occasions and types of gifts. The above checklist briefly summarizes when to do gifting, what are the appropriate gifts and values of the gifts. Though in the above summary, most of the gifts are low-value, the value of the gifts across all the occasions could be expensive, not only in the ceremonial occasions. It is mainly based the strength of the Guanxi that managers have in with customers.

This indeterminate nature of the gift values also opens room for negotiation of corruption and gifting. Depending on the value, some high value gifts could be considered as corruption. It is necessary for the western manager to understand the differences between corruption and gifting.

The corruption gifts mainly exist in two forms: money gift or high value gift. The money gift is often the extra commission fee for each single business order the customers placed. The percentage of the commission fee varies from person to person and is open to negotiation. The high value gift is a less frequently-used form. It could be an expensive electronic product: mobile phones and laptops. The way the corruption gift is given is very implicit and suggestive. This latter type of corruption is often seen as gifting in the Chinese context as well. The two concepts, corruption and gifting, are very different for English people, but the two concepts could be mixed together. It is worthwhile for the western managers to understand the differences between the two and how Chinese people see them.

In the context of communication, this study also pulls out the ways to interact with people in conversations in business settings. Drawn from the data in the context of how sales managers interact with their customers, I summarize the topic choices based on the type of customer; topic choice in small talks; identities at play with different customers in these different talks; and attitudes adopted in interaction with different customers, as shown in the table below.

<b>Topics choices based on the type of customers</b>	<u>New customers:</u> mainly talk about business, with some small talk	<u>Familiar customers:</u> mainly small talk, little is said talked about business.	
<b>Topic choice for small talks with customers</b>	<u>Age-related topic:</u> old men and women like talking about their children;	<u>Gender-related topic:</u> women like talking about cosmetics, fashions, movies. Men talk about jokes and sometimes careers.	<u>Familiarity-related topic:</u> relationships with boyfriend or girlfriend.
<b>Identities at play customers in talks</b>	Brothers with male customers , sisters with female customers	good friends with both female and male customers	family members with customers who are very familiar with each other
<b>Attitudes with different customers</b>	respects for people who are the same age	deference for the people who are much older	Relaxed and fun with the young people: both male and female

**Table 25 Summary of topic choice, identities at play and attitude in conversations**



These different general principles are drawn out from my study and could be used as a guide or a checklist for managers who need to engage in talks with different kinds of customers in different contexts.

Another implication for the western managers could be the principle of favour and reciprocity. Though this principle has been commented upon in the marketing literature on Guanxi, as shown in the summary of the Guanxi literature in Chapter 3, the principle of reciprocity is often discussed in the context of gifting in the published literature. In the study, favour and reciprocity are discussed in the context of helping. Therefore, it shows that favour could be achieved in the form of gift and help, as with reciprocity. Favour in the form of gift could be reciprocated in the form of help, vice versa. In the following table, I summarize the favour and reciprocity in different ways:

<b>Time for reciprocity</b>	<u>Immediate:</u> reciprocate right after receiving the favour	<u>Reciprocity in the long run:</u> reciprocate after a long time when there is an opportunity
<b>Type of favour</b>	<u>Gift:</u> festival gift, occasional gift, ceremonial gift,	<u>Help on business level:</u> problem-solving; help with new business opportunities; providing information and introducing customers. <u>Help on personal level:</u> Intangible help: emotional comfort and reassurance in difficult moments: divorce, quarrelling with family; breaking-up with the other half etc. Tangible help: doing things for them (buying flight tickets for them to go back home)
<b>Type of reciprocity</b>	<u>Gift:</u> reciprocated in the form of gift, but reciprocate a different type of gift	The same type of help listed from above could be applicable here as well

### **Table 26 Summary of the time and type of favour and reciprocity**

As can be seen from the above table of summary, a range of checklists of *what a manager could do, how they could do it and when they can do it* are proposed in detail. These summaries from my findings are trying to add managerial implications to the usual general knowledge of gifting, reciprocity and talking for a long time to make business happen, in a Chinese business context.

These implications for western managers are, to an extent, useful for the Chinese managers who want to do business in UK. The above implications I propose are mainly what would be seen from the western managers as different or even strange in the UK context. However, these are seen as normal and habitual by the Chinese managers. I have not studied international relationships here, but through showing the Chinese managers these implications; they might be able to better understand the differences between Chinese practice and UK practice. In doing so, it might help them do business in UK.

This study has an important managerial implication for both foreign business practitioners doing business in China and for Chinese business practitioners in the sales industry. A lot of foreigners doing business in China will inevitably encounter the culturally specific Chinese Guanxi practice. To understand the importance of Guanxi and to practice Guanxi appropriately is crucial for a business success in China. However, Guanxi practice is so indigenous that a simple understanding of Guanxi as relationships will be far from sufficient. The findings from this thesis show that the importance of Guanxi lies in the practice of Guanxi in a culturally appropriate manner. Therefore, in order to understand Guanxi practice, foreign business practitioners not

only need to know how to practice Guanxi in China, but also need to know why Guanxi is practiced in certain ways and the cultural assumptions behind it.

As for Chinese business practitioners in the sales industry, the findings in this study show that sales managers need to learn the situation-specific practical strategies throughout the sales process to help with the sales work, including how to build up Guanxi, maintain Guanxi with customers, how to communicate with their customers and how to do gift-giving with the customers.

### **11.3 Implications for Policy Makers**

In this study, I have treated two different incidents: gifting incidents and corruption incidents. In the gifting incident, the gifts are mainly low value gifts. In the corruption incidents, the corruption is conducted through giving high value gifts or money gifts. To an extent, both of the incidents are dealing with gifts, since both incidents involve an act of giving from the sales manager to the customers. It is only the value that differs in the two incidents. Given the value and the perceptions of the gifts in the eyes of the sales managers, I have categorized and treated them differently.

The different treatments of these two incidents have implications for policy makers as well. For Chinese companies fully engaged in world trade and for foreign companies fully engaged in Chinese business, the issue of corruption will be highly important. In this study, gifting and corruption are closely related to each other. For policy makers, gifting and corruption might not seem very much different in practice: something is given from one to the other. At the same time, treating corruption as corruption is mainly based on the sales managers' perception. Then it poses a few crucial questions for policy makers: *what is considered as a gift; what is considered as corruption; how*

*the two differ*. For example, giving a box of mooncakes on festivals would not be considered as corruption. Therefore, understanding the difference between the two becomes really crucial.

Drawn from this study, the two treatments of the two incidents might have some useful implications for policy makers. I have summarized their difference in the following table, based on the findings of this study:

<b>Type of practice</b>	<b>Occasion of giving</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Nature</b>	<b>Conditional or Unconditional</b>
<b>Gifting</b>	Mainly ritualized on festival occasions	Low value: Often around 10 pounds per gift	Festival greeting	Unconditional: no bound-up obligations are made.
<b>Corruption</b>	Mainly incidental: always occur after a problem is encountered in business	High value: e.g. an £800 laptop,	Problem-solving	Conditional: on the condition that the problem of the gift-giver could be solved by the gift-receiver.

**Table 27 Difference between gifting practice and corruption practice**

In outlining the difference beyond the identical practice of giving, corruption and gifting differ in terms of four aspects: occasions of giving, value, nature and presence or absence of conditions. Attention to the differences between the two might help the policy makers to formulate the policies regarding the corruption issues for China to engage in world trade fully.

## 11.4 Implications for Research

Based on this study and reflecting upon previous related research, a few implications are drawn. These implications are mainly concerned with Guanxi research in marketing, translation issues in research and research practices, which I will talk about in detail as follows.

Guanxi is mainly understood through a few western constructs in marketing research. Guanxi in many studies is mainly understood through these western constructs. These constructs seem to be overemphasized in Guanxi research and might produce a biased understanding by overuse of these constructs in research. Using these western constructs, research seems to produce similar findings that echo the findings in previous research. For example, a lot of Guanxi research focuses on two western relationship constructs: trust and commitment. Contrary to the overuse of these western constructs, the Chinese construct seems to be underused, though the importance of the Chinese Guanxi constructs are recognized. This study uses the Chinese constructs which are further incorporated into Chinese Confucian cultural concepts; a different understanding of Guanxi results. Therefore, the first implication for research is that it is worthy for Guanxi research in marketing to use these Chinese constructs to obtain a more balanced understanding of Guanxi, rather than just maintaining these concepts at the level of awareness to the researchers.

At the same time, the two dominantly used relationship constructs: trust and commitment, are not found to be as important in understanding Guanxi practice as documented in the literature. The Chinese constructs used in this study: Renqing, Ganqing, and, reciprocity are found to be more important for understanding Guanxi than trust and commitment.

Concerning the two constructs of trust and commitment, I also find that these two could not be operated as two mutually exclusive constructs in the Chinese context. In the Chinese language, 'trust' is usually translated as 'xinren' and 'commitment' is usually translated 'chengnuo'. Since 'xinren' also covers both the semantic meanings of 'trust' and 'commitment' to an extent, the two constructs could not be simply treated as two, since the Chinese translations of them are not mutually exclusive, but mutually inclusive to an extent. This might produce misunderstandings of Guanxi in marketing research.

Reflecting upon the two constructs of trust and commitment, an implication in terms of the translation issue could also be drawn. Currently marketing literature treats translation as unproblematic and mainly as one-to-one translation. However, when translating English into Chinese, some aspects of meanings might be added to the translated word, as shown above. When translating into English from Chinese, some meaning might be lost as well. Chinese is translated into English and is treated as if the full sense of it could be captured fully in its English version.

In this study, I take a three-way translation approach, which is different from the dominant marketing approach of seeing translation as unproblematic, and try to embrace the differences and the meanings of the words in their original language. However, I still encounter the problem of meaning loss in translation, which is never going to be absent in any research. By taking such an approach, I am able to analyze the data in better depth by engaging in the text from the Chinese language with more originality. This could be an implication for future researchers who want to conduct research by paying attention to the problems in translations.

The third implication is for the general research practice. In this study, I talk a lot about my practice of Guanxi with the participants in the field. I show in this study how I come to a very different understanding of the participants alongside my practice of Guanxi with them. While I talk about the successive levels of intimacy that I develop with the people in the field, they tell me different accounts of themselves on these different levels. They are more and more willing to disclose themselves to me in the field. Without engagement in Guanxi practice to such an extent, the data would be shaped up in a different light and my understanding of the people might be very different as well. This actually points to an implication for insightful participant observation and interview research. That is, there is no Guanxi-free research. Researchers might claim that they collect some pure information about the participants, neglecting the idea that the data is built out of a relationship: data occurs within a relationship which occurs to the researcher.

This implication is applicable to every other style of research as well, for example questionnaire and survey based research. For other styles of research, there is engagement in Guanxi-building as well while their research is conducted and this might involve successive levels of Guanxi-building even when researcher sends out their questionnaires and surveys. There is no Guanxi-free context, Guanxi is present even in its absence and it still has an influence when it is absent.

### **11.5 Limitations**

Like all research projects, this study unavoidably has its own limitations. Firstly, the researcher's own experience and, cultural background will constitute a bias in the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the empirical data. Different researchers

carry their own assumptions to interpret and analyze the data. Therefore, the researcher's analysis of the data is only one of the many possible subjective interpretations.

Secondly, the data set has its own limitations, which result in the limitations of the theoretical understandings of identities. The identity construction is mainly drawn from the data as seen from the researcher's perspective and the sales managers' perspective. How identities of the sales managers and the customers are constructed are from the researcher's perspective and the sales managers' perspective. Little is known from the customers' perspective. As indicated in the data, sales managers construct different identities of themselves and the customers in different contexts: in actual interaction with the customers and without interaction with the customers. How customers construct themselves and the sales managers and, whether the customers share the same identity construction as that of sales managers' remain unknown. This limits the understandings of the multiple identity constructions found in the data.

Thirdly, the company itself brings a lot of limitations to the study. The company is a Chinese trading company, without production capacity. For the trading products, their unit prices are usually higher than others since they are traded from the producers' companies. This lack of expertise in products puts the company in a disadvantaged situation such that it could only reach some small customer companies. For those franchised products, it mainly relies on the technology and expertise involved in the products. For these products, they usually have a good competitive advantage and could reach big customer companies. For a production company with leading technology in their products, the sales practice might be very different. The sales managers might be in a more powerful position than the customers, if they are really the market leader in the field. In this case, the sales identities at play might be very



different as well. A future study on the sales identities in a production company with strong product expertise or which is a market leader in its field will be very interesting to look at.

With China currently undergoing massive change, this data could potentially have reflected, international business relationships with which the sales managers could be engaged. However, the findings here I do not capture the effect of internationalization on sales practices at all. This might be because the company mainly deals with Chinese customers and the company does not have much exposure to the western companies and western practices. It is a very small sized company and there might not be enough opportunities for doing business with the west. Their way of practising Guanxi seems to be very local and some of the people's viewpoint might sound a bit localised as well.

## **11.6 Future Research**

There are three different aspects that could be further researched in the future.

Firstly, as pointed out in the limitations section, the internationalization of the Chinese market and its impact on marketing practices is not shown in this study. Future studies could be looking at the sales identities in the internationalization of Chinese business. The sales practices might be very different and the sales identities made in these practices might be different as well.

Secondly, due to the massive changes involved, a longitudinal study of the same company might be worthwhile. The study was conducted in 2008. The company and the industry the company is in might have undergone some changes during the last

three years. The company might have more involvement in international relations or have more international elements in the sales activities. At the time of the study, the consumer markets for food additives is in a transitional phase: companies start to use natural food additives, though at that time artificial food additives were prevalent in the market place due to the low cost. Three years later, a healthy life style becomes more and more popular among Chinese consumers and therefore more companies might turn to natural food additives to target their consumers. This change might produce different sales practices as well. Since this study is based in a company selling traded natural food additives, the sales identities and the sales practice found in this study might change as well. It will be fascinating to go back for a longitudinal study to look at the sales identities. They might have more international elements as well.

Thirdly, it will be worthwhile to make a direct comparison between the Chinese Guanxi and UK relationships. Based on this study, some of the practices of the Guanxi and UK relationships might look similar. For example, giving a box of mooncakes in the Chinese festival and giving a box of wine at Christmas will be perceived as very similar by UK people. However, the identities that are constructed beyond these two practices may be different. Based on the analysis findings, there are two aspects that are potentially practiced very differently in terms of identities in UK and Chinese sales practice. Therefore, future research could be looking at the identity constructions in gifting practice; and in communication or interaction practice between UK and China.

## 11.7 Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the contributions, implications and, limitations of this study and potential future research leading on from this study. In view of the data and the gap in the literature, four contributions are identified. Firstly, differing from the current literature on identity research, this thesis shows a singular discursive resource that individuals draw upon in their construction of the contradictory selves. Secondly, extending the current theorization on the relationships among identities, three different relationships are found in the data as antagonistic, intertwining and disguising. Thirdly, contradictory to the current literature which views identity regulation as a result of organizational control for managerially defined objectives, this thesis shows identities are regulated through a non-organizational control discourse, but also achieve the same managerial objective. Fourthly, it introduces a novel method for data analysis and provides a richer insight into the multi-lingual data through breaking the current framing of the English language.

I continue the chapter with the implications of this research for western managers, Chinese managers, policy makers and research. For western managers, I summarize the data findings and categorize them through tables of checklists. Use of these checklists, would help the western managers to understand how, with what and when to practice gift-giving, communication and, reciprocity in different situations. Also through these checklists, I am able to show the Chinese managers the difference in practices between UK and China by highlighting what is seen to be habitual for the Chinese but as strange and new for the western managers. For policy makers, the chapter highlights the differences between gifts and corruption with a view to facilitating China's engagement in international trade. For research implications, I list observations in three areas that are based on reflections on previous research: the

Chinese Guanxi constructs are under emphasized and western constructs are over emphasized; there is a potential loss of meaning in translations; and, as a comment upon research practices, there is no Guanxi-free research.

The limitations are summarized mainly in connection with the limitations brought by the company itself in its business which does not capture the internationalisation of business at all. It is therefore suggested that future research should explore sales identities in an internationalised context or through a longitudinal study in the same company with more international elements. Future research on direct comparisons between UK and Chinese relationships are also suggested, in terms of the sales identities in gifting practice and communication practice.

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## Appendix

**Table 1 Summary of Guanxi literature in marketing research**

In the following table, the relevant themes that are discussed in each paper are marked with an ‘\*’ in the tables.

Articles and authors		Yang and Wang, (2011)	Liu et al. (2008)	Shi et al. (2011)	Barnes et al., (2011)
<b>Key theoretical origins</b>		Governance theory	Relationship marketing theory	Relationship Marketing theory	Social network theory
Conceptual		*	*	*	*
Empirical			*	*	*
Quantitative methods			*	*	*
Qualitative methods					
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing	*		*	*
	ganqing	*		*	*
	Reciprocity				*
	Face	*			
	Gifting				
	Xinyong (trust)	*			*
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust		*		
	Commitment			*	
	Competence				
	Relationship investment			*	
	Satisfaction				
	Risk		*		
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance				
	Corporate capability				
	Market orientation				
	Relationship marketing				
	B2B relationships		*		
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				*
	Governance	*			
	Management strategy				
	Marketing Channel				
	Power				
	Conflict				
	Relationship quality				
	Negotiation				
	Antecedent of Guanxi				
Consequences of Guanxi					

Articles and authors		Shou et al. (2011)	Chung (2011)	Hu and Stanton (2011)	Nie et al. (2011)
Key theoretical origins		Trust in relationship marketing	Market orientation performance theory	Western network theory	Guanxi-related and performance literature
Conceptual		*		*	*
Empirical		*	*	*	*
Quantitative methods			*	*	*
Qualitative methods			*		
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing	*			
	ganqing	*			*
	Reciprocity				*
	Face	*			*
	Gifting				
	Xinyong (trust)	*			
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust	*			*
	Commitment				
	Competence				
	Relationship investment				*
	Satisfaction				
	Risk				
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance		*	*	*
	Corporate capability				
	Market orientation		*		
	Relationship marketing				
	B2B relationships				
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				
	Governance				
	Management strategy				
	Marketing Channel				
	Power				
	Conflict				
	Relationship quality				
	Negotiation				
	Antecedent of Guanxi				
Consequences of Guanxi					

Articles and authors		Chen, Ellinger and Tian(2011a)	Chen, Huang and Sternquist (2011b)	Chen and Wu (2011)	Li and Sheng (2011)
Key theoretical origins		Contingency theory	Social network theory, and relationship marketing	Social capital theory	Social network theory
Conceptual		*		*	*
Empirical		*	*	*	*
Quantitative methods		*	*	*	*
Qualitative methods			*		
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing	*			
	ganqing				
	Reciprocity	*	*		
	Face	*			
	Gifting				
	Xinyong (trust)				
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust		*		
	Commitment		*		
	Competence				
	Relationship investment				
	Satisfaction		*		
	Risk				
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance				*
	Corporate capability			*	
	Market orientation				
	Relationship marketing				
	B2B relationships		*		
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				
	Governance				
	Management strategy	*			
	Marketing Channel				
	Power				
	Conflict				
	Relationship quality		*		
	Negotiation				
	Antecedent of Guanxi				
Consequences of Guanxi					

Articles and authors		Gao et al. (2010)	Zhuang et al. (2010)	Buttery and Leung (1998)	Leung et al. (2005)
Key theoretical origins		Business networks by IMP	Marketing channels	Negotiation theory Confucian Guanxi culture	Relationship marketing theory
Conceptual				*	
Empirical		*	*		*
Quantitative methods			*		*
Qualitative methods		*			
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing				
	ganqing		*		
	Reciprocity				
	Face			*	
	Gifting				
	Xinyong (trust)				*
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust				
	Commitment				*
	Competence				*
	Relationship investment				
	Satisfaction				*
	Risk				
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance				
	Corporate capability				
	Market orientation				
	Relationship marketing				*
	B2B relationships	*	*		
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				
	Governance				
	Management strategy				
	Marketing Channel		*		
	Power		*		
	Conflict		*		*
	Relationship quality				
	Negotiation			*	
	Antecedent of Guanxi				
Consequences of Guanxi					

Articles and authors		Lee et al (2001)	Trimarchi et al. (2010)	Qian et al. (2007)	Ambler and Styles (2000)
Key theoretical origins		Guanxi-related theory	Relationship marketing and IMP network theory	Chinese cultural values	Relationship marketing and Guanxi-related theory
Conceptual		*			*
Empirical		*	*	*	
Quantitative methods		*		*	
Qualitative methods			*		
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing			*	
	ganqing				
	Reciprocity			*	
	Face			*	
	Gifting			*	
	Xinyong (trust)				
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust				
	Commitment				
	Competence				
	Relationship investment				
	Satisfaction				
	Risk				
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance	*			
	Corporate capability				
	Market orientation				
	Relationship marketing				*
	B2B relationships		*		
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				
	Governance				
	Management strategy				
	Marketing Channel				
	Power				
	Conflict				
	Relationship quality	*			
	Negotiation				
	Antecedent of Guanxi	*			
Consequences of Guanxi	*				

Articles and authors		Wang (2007b)	Yen et al. (2011)	Yen and Barnes (2011)	Zhuang et al.(2008)
Key theoretical origins		Western relationship theory	Chinese Guanxi-related theory	Relationship Marketing and Chinese Guanxi theory	Power based theory
Conceptual		*			
Empirical			*	*	*
Quantitative methods			*	*	*
Qualitative methods			*		
Chinese relational constructs for Guanxi	Renqing	*	*		
	ganqing	*	*		
	Reciprocity				
	Face				
	Gifting				
	Xinyong (trust)	*	*		
western theory-based relational construct used in discussion of Guanxi	Trust	*			
	Commitment				
	Competence				
	Relationship investment				
	Satisfaction				
	Risk				
Guanxi and other theoretical concepts	Firm performance				
	Corporate capability				
	Market orientation				
	Relationship marketing				
	B2B relationships	*		*	
	Relationship stability				
	Relationship outcome				
	Governance				
	Management strategy				
	Marketing Channel				*
	Power				*
	Conflict				
	Relationship quality		*		
	Negotiation				
Antecedent of Guanxi					
Consequences of Guanxi					