

1. 面子第一

“面子”是汉语中一个重要而有趣的词，它由字面意思衍生为“尊严”的代名词，并把“尊严”的含义扩大了。“面子”成为渗透于整个中国人社会生活中的一种重要观念。中国人总想在别人面前表现出某种程度的体面和优越感，能够做到这一点就算是有“面子”，反之则是“丢面子”。

中国现代著名文学家鲁迅先生曾经说过，“面子是中国人的精神纲领，只要抓住这个……全身都跟着走动了。”现代国学大师林语堂先生也有过精辟的论述：“中国民族的特征之一，就是重人情、重面子。”在中国人看来，“不给面子是最大的无礼”，就如同西方人向对手挑战一样。给人面子，或者要求别人给自己面子，是合乎中国传统文化“礼”的规范的，这乃是中国社会交换的“人情法则”。

对此，许多外国学者也有敏锐的觉察。美国人阿瑟·亨德森·史密斯写的《中国人气质》一书的第一章就叫“给面子”。他发表了自己的看法：“在中国，面子这个词，实际上是一个复杂的集合名词，其中包含的意义，比我们所能描述或者可能领悟的含义还要多，





面子问题正是打开中国人许多最重要特性这把暗锁的钥匙。”

面子是构成中国人际关系结构的一个重要因素，而且中国人的面子观念极强，“士可杀，不可辱”，这六个字从古至今教导着许多人。尊严即面子，是一种不可抑止的人生追求。人为自己的尊严发起保卫战时，是连性命都可以丢的，其他的各种努力更不在话下了。

中国秦朝末年著名将领项羽的乌江自刎就是个典型的例子。他打了败仗后退到乌江，本来他是可以乘渔船逃回江东的，但他放弃了，因为他觉得“无颜见江东父老（没有脸回去面对他的乡亲父老）”，最后他选择了自刎。他的死成全了他的尊严，成全了一代枭雄的气节，成就了他名垂青史。可见面子对中国人而言，有时甚至比生命还重要。

历史上还有因伤及面子而差点亡国的教训。据《东周列国志》载：春秋战国时诸侯争霸，齐桓公励精图治，使齐国终成春秋五霸之首。传至齐顷公时，国力仍十分雄厚，晋国、鲁国、卫国、曹国等邻国臣服于齐，每年向齐国上贡。有一年四国派大夫一同出使齐国。但巧的是四国的大夫都有残疾：晋国的郤克是个单眼瞎，鲁国的季孙行父是个秃子，卫国的孙良夫是个瘸子，曹国的公子首是个驼背。齐顷公为讨母亲欢心，便成心想取笑

他们。于是他暗中选来眇者、秃者、跛者、驼者各一人，让他们分别服侍四国的使者，这惹得太后和宫女哈哈大笑。四国使者感到丢尽了面子，勃然大怒，于是共商出兵伐齐。三年后，四国结成同盟，大举进攻齐国，齐国大败，从此以后就一蹶不振了。这正是不顾及他人面子而导致的恶果。

事物往往具有两面性。有时强调“面子”是为了人格、人格和尊严，值得人人为之而努力；可有时过于偏狭，为暂时的面子而失去长久的面子也会令中国人吃些苦头，结果导致“死要面子活受罪”。清朝时，中国的农耕文明发展到很高的水平，因而政府自认为天朝物丰，国土辽阔，强大无比，于是不屑与落后的国家交往，采取闭关锁国之策。结果错过了近代人类文明发展的大好机遇，给中国社会的发展和进步带来极大危害。

“好面子”是中国文化中的一个突出现象。由于建立和维持良好的人际关系对个体生存和发展非常重要，因此中国人在交往中很重视他人的看法和感受。

面子之于中国人，是一门处世学问，一门艺术。面子是有大小的。这不是说人的脸有大有小，而是说对于不同的人，面子的影响程度不一样。一般来说，面子的大小和人的社会地位的高低是成正比的。地位越高，官职越大，面子也就越大；反之，地位越低，面子就越小。





当然，老百姓也爱面子，也有自己的尊严。要想与中国人愉快交往，最大的窍门就是给他们留足“面子”，尊重他们的人格和文化习惯。

Mianzi Outweighs All Else

“*Mianzi*” is an important and interesting word in Mandarin Chinese which has evolved into a synonym for “dignity” and even beyond that from its literal meaning. It embodies a significant concept deeply rooted in Chinese society. When with others, Chinese people always take to heart their dignity and superiority, which they hope will earn them due respect. Otherwise, they will “lose face”.

Lu Xun, a renowned modern Chinese writer, says that *mianzi* is the key moral to the Chinese. It's like the pigtail everyone wore during the Manchu reign. Once seized by his pigtail, one could not move a single step, but was completely under another's control. In the words of Lin Yutang, a master of Chinese culture, one characteristic of the Chinese nation is their value of humanity and the respect of others. No humiliation would be more unbearable than a wound to their feelings. This is the same as in a duel between two Western

gentlemen. To show due respect for others and expect others to do the same in return is the Chinese ritual and rule of exchange in worldly affairs.

Of Chinese *mianzi*, Western scholars also have incisive observations. In *Chinese Characteristics*, Arthur Henderson Smith (1845-1932) talks about *mianzi* in the first chapter. “In China, *mianzi* is an intricate collective noun, which has far more connotations than what we can describe or understand,” he writes. “It is the key to discover many important characteristics of the Chinese nation.”

Mianzi is an important link in the Chinese social network. Dignity or face is an irresistible pursuit for the face-conscious Chinese. As the old saying goes, a scholar would rather die than be humiliated. To defend his dignity, one would lay down his life, let alone any other efforts.

Xiang Yu, an ambitious general of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), provides one example. After a vital defeat, he could have taken a boat, and fled to his hometown east of the Wujiang River. But, feeling ashamed to face his country folk, he committed suicide. His death saved his dignity and made him revered in history. This shows that to the Chinese, face weighs far more than life.

Humiliation could even incur warfare. As recorded in

