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Aggressive Behavior in Chinese Society:
The Problem of Maintaining
Order and Harmony

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SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTRE
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY
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by

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家和萬事興；家衰口不停

-- When a family is united, everything prospers;
When a family argues, everything fails.

(Traditional Chinese proverb)

Introduction

To undertake an overview and explanation of aggressive behavior in Chinese culture may appear to be the height of intellectual temerity. After all, there are more than one billion Chinese people scattered throughout the various countries of the world, each influenced to varying degrees by the climate, the economic resources, the political concerns, and the agencies of socialization found in these various countries. So, social scientists, when discussing the data base for their observations on a Chinese culture, dutifully provide a disclaimer for the generalizability of their conclusions to Chinese people as a whole.

This cautionary note is entirely appropriate. There is no question, for example, that industrialization has led to the increasing erosion of the extended family system and the rising economic status of women (Wong, 1975). These changes will have important consequences for the husband-wife relationship and thereby for the socialization of Chinese children within the family. It is also clear that the recent ideological re-orientation of mainland China will lead to changes in educational and commercial priorities (Ho, 1979) and thereby for the socialization of children outside the family. These changes must be studied and their impact assessed.

Despite these, and similar caveats, we discern a unity in the results from the various explorations of aggressive behavior in Chinese culture. Ho's (1980) conclusion bears repeating in this context:

Whatever regional or ethnic differences there may be, important though they are, they appear less significant when gauged against commonalities in the general pattern. Even among acculturated Chinese Americans, features of the traditional pattern are still apparent. Despite undeniable changes that have taken place, traditional conceptions and values, however modified and disguised, continue to exert their influence on the socialization process and leave their indelible marks on the child to the present day. (p. 48)

We believe that this commonality derives from traditional Confucian ideology, itself consistent with an ecology of limited resources and high population density (Foster, 1965; La Barne, 1945). Ideal character types are those who can fit smoothly into a collectivist social orientation (Hofstede, 1980, Ch. 5) where the paramount concern is for the integrity and advancement of the group, not the individual. The basic group is the family, however defined, and the various modi operandi found functional in this context are then generalized elsewhere, resulting in a consistency to Chinese behavior.

During the Cultural Revolution this Confucian ideology was vigorously attacked in Mainland China (Louie, 1980). These attacks were not surprisingly directed at the class system inherent in the Confucian social structuring. What impact they may have had on socialization practices so far, especially within the family, is a moot point, however. In a recent analysis of village and family life, Parish and Whyte (1978) draw the following conclusion, "Changes have occurred, but much about the nature of childrearing, and particularly the role of the family in childrearing, appears relatively unchanged." (p. 233). We thus believe that a Confucian analysis has continuing validity towards an understanding of Chinese interpersonal behavior.

Obviously the decision to perceive consistency and continuity within various Chinese sub-cultures is a deliberate one. It certainly is not blind to the wealth of evidence supporting the situational control of behavior (Bandura, 1969; Mischel, 1968). Nevertheless, we are impressed by the coherence in the various sources of evidence we have reviewed. As the social philosophy of Confucius provides the organization for this unity, we will begin with a discussion of its relevant features.

The Social Philosophy of Confucius

At the heart of Chinese culture lies the Confucian concept of filial piety. As a child the son is nurtured by his parents to whom his debt of gratitude can never be repaid. In partial recompense the son is expected to show unquestioning obedience to the parents, to strive for their interests, and to care for them when they are less able to do so. These requirements were continually underscored in folk wisdom, the classroom, and classical writings such as the Twenty-four models of filial piety. In an agricultural economy marked by scarcity of resources and little social mobility, they carried considerable force. An unfilial son had nowhere else to go and little opportunity for self-support.

In contrast to the Western family dynamic, the imperative was not to train the child for eventual independence from his or her family of origin. Instead the family unit, with the exception of daughters, ideally remained intact throughout the life cycle of its members. In consequence the development of different character traits was emphasized in the socialization of the child. Essentially these were the personal attributes that promoted

group harmony -- deference to authority, responsibility in leadership, self-abnegation, emotional restraint, and co-operativeness. It is in this sense that we may regard Chinese people as socially oriented -- they are trained to promote the harmony and integrity of the group, with the parent-son grouping as the basic model. The socialization of children aimed at promoting interdependence, not independence.

In distinction to Western socialization practices, the training of aggressiveness has no place in the Chinese system. Solomon (1971) puts it this way:

In cultures which tolerate or encourage the development of a sense of autonomy in children, aggressive impulses play an important role in the child's efforts at self-assertion, his attempts to establish an identity for himself independent of the adults who bore and reared him. But, as we have stressed, self-assertion was the one thing which Chinese parents would not tolerate. Hence every indication of willful, assertive, or aggressive action on the part of the child would be severely discouraged. By inhibiting the expression of aggression in their children, Chinese parents (consciously or unconsciously) were seeking to insure the continued dependence of these guarantors of their future security. (p. 69)

So we can see the rationale behind the link between filiality and lack of aggressiveness -- the owner of the hand that is to feed one in later life must be taught not to bite, for fear that he might also attack (and abandon) his parents.

Aggressive behavior towards the parents and older siblings is thus seen as part of a larger danger -- disruptive self-assertion. This self-assertion is dangerous because it undermines the authoritarian structuring of family relations legitimized by Confucian social philosophy.

The Chinese view is consistent with a recent conceptualization of aggression within the framework of coercive control (Tedeschi, Gaes, and Rivera, 1977). From this perspective aggressive behavior is one of a group of influence tactics that can be used by an actor to assume power over another. "Coercion is a means of influence and when a person cannot persuade, bribe, manipulate, or otherwise induce a target to comply to his demands, then the success of influence may depend on the source's ability to restrain, transport, immobilize, injure or destroy the target." (p. 111). Clearly all such influence attempts by children must be closely monitored to protect family order and harmony. The more dramatic and obvious forms of coercive influence, such as physical assault, in particular must be suppressed.

Although we have focussed on eliminating children's aggression within the family unit, this concern extended to relations with neighbours. Margery Wolf (1970) has shown how arguments between neighbour's children could escalate as the "face" of their respective families quickly became involved fanning the initial conflict. There was no question of whether the aggressive behavior was justified -- merely to be involved in an altercation led to parental punishment (A. Wolf, 1964). So great was parental concern that one child could often retaliate against another simply by informing the other child's parents about their child's transgression (M. Wolf, 1970). The parents would then punish their child, reinforcing their discipline with aphorisms from the folk culture, such as "君子動口不動手" (A civilized person should use his mouth but not his hands).

The issue here is not one of maintaining hierarchical order, but rather one of preserving harmonious relations between families in a situation of interdependence. As one Chinese proverb puts it, "對口對面" (We see each other everyday). Psychological studies have shown that the expectation of future interactions with a target person reduces the amount of pain a subject is willing to administer to that person (e.g., Bond and Dutton, 1975). Presumably this reluctance to inflict pain operates because the receiver of pain can later attack the initial aggressor. It is therefore in everyone's interests to suppress any aggressive behavior since everyone is potentially vulnerable.

This dynamic would obviously apply to any society with high population density, low residential mobility, and considerable interdependence (Whiting and Whiting, 1975). Chinese society is hardly unique in these respects. Constraints against aggressive behavior outside the family add further support, however, to the constraints operating within the family.

The structuring of traditional Chinese society would also seem to amplify the sanction against disruptive aggression. In the Confucian tradition social integration was ensured by organizing social relationships into hierarchical dualities, for which the father-son relationship was the ideal case. In effect everyone was locked into a consensually accepted dominance hierarchy. As Hinde (1974) has argued, the existence of such a hierarchy precludes the need for aggressive behavior to be used as an instrument to establish and maintain power relations. "It is as though aggression is shown in relation to the need for asserting rank the more uncertain the rank, the greater the need to confirm it." (p. 343).

Although Hinde was discussing the behavior of non-human primates, his argument is suggestive when extended to cross-cultural human comparisons. It may be hypothesized that there will be less overall aggression in societies where hierarchical relationships are widely found and generally accepted.¹

When such relationships of power are not accepted by subordinates, we have the recipe for revolution. Aggressive acts become instrumental in overturning established authority. Violence is thus seen as the precursor of anarchy and ultimately a redistribution of power. As a Chinese proverb puts it, " 讒口交門, 為亂之階梯 " (It is a step towards confusion when a quarrel begins). By this logic aggressive behavior in general must be controlled in order to maintain the status quo.

From many avenues then we can see the rationale for a general condemnation of aggressive behavior in Chinese society. If violence is suppressed, families will remain intact, neighbourhood relations will be peaceful, and the wider social order will be protected. In short, harmony will be maintained.

Possible Genetic Influences

Throughout this article we will focus on social determinants of aggressive behavior. Possible genetic inputs should not be overlooked, however. In 1971 Freedman reported the results of a study comparing Chinese-American and European-American newborns across a wide spectrum of behaviors. The Chinese babies were less emotionally reactive, habituated

more rapidly to aversive stimuli, and were more easily consoled when upset. There were no differences between the two groups, however, in sensory development, maturation of the central nervous system, motor development, and social responsiveness. Given the absence of covariates to explain the differences in emotional lability, Freedman argued for a genetic explanation.

Under the endogamous pressures of Chinese culture (Hsu, 1953), it is possible that a gene pool has developed favoring genotypes predisposing to less emotionally responsive behavior. Such behavior is certainly more adaptive in a culture which places such a premium on self-control and emotional restraint (Solomon, 1971, Ch. 4). Indeed, data show that Chinese vs. American differences in activity level, irritability, and lability continue well into infancy (Freedman, 1974; Green, 1969; Kagan, Kearsley, and Zelazo, 1978). We expect that these differences would be found with adult samples also given the dynamics of the Chinese social system.

The question for our purposes involves the relationship between these possible genetic differences and aggressive behavior. As Hinde (1974) has concluded, "In man, also, some individual differences in aggressiveness may be basically genetic, though precisely how the genetic factors operate is far from understood." (p. 282). With the present state of knowledge, then, the issue must remain unresolved. Throughout the following discussion, however, readers should keep in mind that the observations on aggression in the Chinese may have some hereditary foundation.

Comparative Data on Chinese Socialization of Aggressive Behavior

The quality of the data on aggressive behavior varies considerably -- from retrospective comparisons of interview data to self-reports of behavior. In general the comparisons involve American subjects as the yardstick against which the various Chinese samples are compared. The implications of the Chinese social orientation are diametrically opposed to the American self-orientation (Yang, 1980) and so this limitation in cultural samples is not altogether unfortunate. It does, however, narrow our perspective.

As our analysis of Confucian traditions suggested, Chinese parents are consistently shown to limit aggressive behavior in their children. In a retrospective comparison Sollenberger (1968) used the interview schedule developed by Sears, Maceby, and Levin (1957) with Chinese-American mothers. Their data was then compared with the original Cambridge sample studied by the Harvard group. Obviously such a comparison is fraught with methodological difficulties, but the differences are so dramatic as to preclude any explanation based solely on extraneous variables. For example, fully 74% of the Chinese mothers reported putting no demands on their child to behave aggressively or to fight back under any circumstances. The majority of the American mothers, however, reported demanding aggressive behaviors from their children in "appropriate" circumstances and to fight back. This contrast is supported by data from university students of five cultures responded to a 28-item attitude inventory developed by Cox (1971) and reported in Ryback, Sanders, Lorentz, and Koestenblatt (1980). More American (61%) and Israeli (46%) and Indian (38%) than Ethiopian (22%), Chinese from Taiwan (19%), or

Thai (5%) students indicated that they were likely to allow aggressive behavior in their children. The Thai (5%) and the Chinese (6%) were also the lowest in encouraging aggressive behavior (Israelis - 10%, Indians - 22%, U.S.A. - 29%, Ethiopians - 32%). When specific forms of aggressive behavior were questioned (e.g., fighting with other children, temper tantrums, saying bad words, property damage, disobedience to parents or to other authority, the Chinese sample consistently showed the lowest incidence of support for the practice. At the level of verbal reports, then, there seems to be a consistent disapproval of children's aggression among older Chinese.

Given such parental attitudes it is hardly surprising to find Solomon (1971, p. 68) reporting that for his respondents the most frequently recalled reason for parental punishment was quarrelling or fighting (44.5%). Niem and Collard's (1972) results support our previous assumption that Chinese parents are more prone than American parents to discipline their children's aggressive behaviors. They asked Chinese mothers from Taiwan and American mothers from Massachusetts to record their disciplining of children's aggression over a thirty day period. Given roughly the same number of aggressive episodes from the seventeen children, Niem and Collard found that the Chinese children were more likely to receive some form of parental discipline in response. Clearly Chinese adults regard aggressive behavior in children as undesirable and respond with socializing pressures.

Type of discipline. The method that such control takes however is an important issue because the parents can inadvertently model the very

aggression they are attempting to suppress (Bandura and Walters, 1959; Sears et al., 1957). Data on this point are conflicting. Seventy-nine percent of Solomon's (1971) sample reported receiving frequent physical punishments from parents. Arthur Wolf's (1964) analysis confirms that of Solomon. After observing a Hokkien village in Taiwan, he asserted, "Rather than rewarding their children for the absence of aggression, or shaming them with reference to cultural models, the Chinese parents choose to use harsh physical punishments." (p. 7). Sollenberger (1968), however, concluded that exclusion from the social life of the family or withdrawal of rewards were more frequently employed than physical punishment by Chinese-American parents. Also, Niem and Collard (1972) found that:

The Chinese parents reported using physical punishment 15 times, while the American parents reported 33 instances. Only 2 of the Chinese children were spanked (a total of 6 times), while 11 of the American children were spanked (a total of 23 times over the same period). (p. 96)

Social-class, rural-urban or sub-ethnic variations may account for these inconsistencies in the literature (Olsen, 1975; Ward, 1965).

Regardless of the methods used, the single minded intent is clear. As Arthur Wolf (1964) puts it, ".... the primary goal of child training practices in Hsia Chi Chou is the inhibition of physical aggression." (p. 6). We believe this conclusion is applicable to all Chinese societies. Partial confirmation comes from Niem and Collard (1972). They found that the largest difference between their middle-class American and Taiwanese samples lay in the sub-category of physical attack on another. This lower level of observed aggression in these younger Chinese children (4 - 4.5 years) confirms similar

findings about aggressiveness in general using older children and different methodologies (e.g., Hsu, Watrous, and Lord, 1961, used Rorschach responses; Hwang, 1968, used responses to Rosenzweig's picture-frustration test; and Scofield and Sun, 1960, used retrospective reports and global comparisons by judges.)²

Future directions. Reflection on the studies to date yields a number of suggestions for research into the area of aggression. First, information is needed about school aged children to supplement what is available on pre-schoolers. Ho (1977-78, 1980) and A. Wolf (1964) among others have noted the dramatic increase in socialization pressures that are applied to the Chinese child upon entry to primary school. If parental discipline, especially physical discipline increases at this age, then there may be a concomitant increase in the aggressiveness of these children outside their families. This in fact is exactly what Arthur Wolf has observed. Contrasting his data with those from the Six Cultures Study, he asserts that, "The Chinese appear to be the rare case in which aggression and age are positively correlated." (p. 15). Further confirmation of this finding would be most illuminating and reflect on the discontinuity of socialization pressures.

Secondly, greater attention must be paid to various types of aggressive activity at various ages. Niem and Collard (1972) found that their Chinese sample showed more frequent verbal aggression than comparable American children. This finding is consistent with A. Wolf's (1964) observation that Chinese children rarely received punishment for verbal attacks (see later section on public abuse). Some care will be required in constructing scales to measure such aggressive behavior, however. As Solomon (1971) has

pointed out, "To be sure, such aggression (among the Chinese) is usually masked behind the forms of propriety (禮貌): the subtle twisting of good manners into an insult; the verbal abuse before a subordinate" (p. 79-80). Also implicit in Solomon's remarks is the need to record the target of the aggression. One might well expect greater use of covert aggression towards superiors with the Chinese, for example, as this pattern of aggressive behavior is more compatible with Confucian social dynamics.

These suggestions for finer analyses reflect our concern that the question of aggression requires much more sophisticated consideration in cross-cultural studies than it has previously received. Simply asking whether members of culture X are more aggressive in terms of a particular operational definition than members of culture Y is not productive. Actors aggress against classes of targets using various methods, all within a social context. This reality underscores the usefulness of the conceptual analysis of aggression in terms of coercive control (Tedeschi et al., 1977). Such a model focusses our attention on critical features of the social context such as the relationship of the interactants, the normative structure regulating the interaction, and the type of influence tactic used. By so doing it directs our attention to more articulated dimensions on which cultures may be expected to vary in their impact on aggressive behavior.

Related Socialization Practices

We should not overlook socialization practices which probably affect the expression of aggressive behavior in less direct ways. For example,

Ward (1970) has described the often provocative and frustration-inducing behaviors of adults and elder siblings towards younger children in the family. In the tantrum that follows the enraged child is ignored and left "to cry himself out". A succession of these experiences is likely to result in a low likelihood that aggressive behaviors will become a probable response to frustration (Bandura, 1973). This interaction pattern is also a technique for inducing a state of "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975), at least vis-a-vis higher status agents of frustration. Regardless of how it is conceptualized, this pattern of socialization probably helps to increase the apparent frustration tolerance of the Chinese by making aggressive and other active responses to provocation much less likely.

Psychological Experimentation

When we move to the area of psychological experimentation, we find a paucity of studies on aggressive behavior itself. There have been no within-study cross-cultural comparisons and only a few investigations involving Chinese subjects alone. Given this situation we will supplement the available material by referring to studies whose subject matter has suggestive although indirect implications for the understanding of aggressive behavior in Chinese culture.

Competition. A series of studies has involved the perception of a future opponent (Bond, 1979; Bond and Hui, 1980, 1981). In this research paradigm subjects are placed in a competitive situation against another subject and asked to evaluate their opponent prior to the contest. Zero-sum situations such as this have a clear relationship to aggression as one can

only win by preventing one's opponent from obtaining the available pay-off. This connection is even more marked for the Chinese. As Solomon (1971) put the matter, "Competition among peers is seen to be troublesome for social unity for the expectation is that rivalry will bring out bad feelings and lead to unrestrained conflict." (p. 131)

Thus we could anticipate that an unavoidable competition against another would present Chinese subjects with an awkward situation. One solution was to rate higher the likability of a stimulus person described as a future opponent compared to those of the same stimulus person described as a non-opponent (Bond, 1979). It appears as if subjects were compensating their future opponents for a possible defeat by enhancing their opponent's personal qualities. This strategy allows Chinese subjects to observe the requirement of "Friendship first, competition second" (友誼第一, 比賽第二).

This ambivalence about competition is underscored by the results from an experiment by Li, Cheung, and Kau (1979). They instructed Chinese children in Hong Kong and Taiwan how to use Madsen's Co-operative Board (Madsen, 1971). They found that their subjects, in contrast to American subjects, continued to co-operate even when the reward structure was changed from a co-operative one to a competitive one. Evidently it is relatively difficult to elicit competitive behavior from those reared in the Chinese tradition.

One's private wishes may of course be quite different from one's public behavior. The enhancement of a future opponent mentioned before (Bond, 1979)

occurred across all subjects only when the ratings are made publicly vis-a-vis the experimenter. The higher ratings of a future opponent disappeared when subjects were allowed to make their ratings anonymously vis-a-vis the experimenter (Bond and Hui, 1980). Aggrandizing an opponent's personal qualities thus appears to be a strategy of proper self-presentation to a higher status person like an experimenter. In fact Chinese subjects who describe themselves as "competitive" denigrated their future opponent's competitive skills when allowed to make their ratings anonymously (Bond and Hui, 1981). This finding alerts us to the distinction between public face and private self among the Chinese, a phenomenon entirely consistent with their "social orientation" (Yang, 1980). One may harbour negative impressions about another, but these divisive perceptions should not be given a public voice. For, as a common adage puts it, "A team of four horses cannot drag back a word once uttered (一言既出, 驷馬難追)".

Conformity. Behavior that reduces the distance between one's opinion or behavior and that of some reference group can be viewed as satisfying various motivations. One is to regard the perception of one's deviance as a cue eliciting anxiety in persons trained to be dependent on groups or authority figures for guidance (e.g., Meade, 1970). Early cross-cultural comparisons found Chinese to be more conforming than Americans and explained the results by using the dependency construct (Chu, 1966; Huang and Harris, 1973; Meade and Barnard, 1975).

It is equally plausible to view conformity behavior as a characteristic strategy designed to forestall open conflict. Solomon (1971) has argued that

the socializing of Chinese children to accept the dictates of paternal authority without question ill-prepared them as adults to resolve differences without escalation into conflict. "In a society that teaches its children that avoidance of a dispute is preferable to moderated resolution of interpersonal differences, there is little between the poles of harmony and confusion" (P. 132). To avoid confrontation and possible aggression, then, Chinese would be inclined to moderate their public position when they are seen to hold a deviant position vis-a-vis some important reference group.

Support for this alternative explanation comes from a study by Meade and Barnard (1973). In a carefully controlled setting high in experimental realism, they arranged for Chinese and American students to appear as deviates from group opinion on six different issues. Contrary to previous results, the American sample conformed more than the Chinese on the average. This difference occurred despite the fact that the Chinese subjects conformed more frequently. What happened was that the Chinese subjects generally moderated their stance in the face of group pressure, but only slightly. Americans, on the other hand, conformed less frequently but to a much greater extent when they did so. Americans appear to have responded to the issue, changing their opinion dramatically either in agreement or in opposition to the group. The Chinese on the other hand appear to have responded to the process element of group difference, attempting to circumvent conflict by compromising slightly on almost every point of contention. One wonders what forms of attitude change might have been found had private, rather than public, measures been taken.

Distribution of resources. Use of the equity principle (Adams, 1965) for allocating resources is obviously disruptive in an economy marked by scarcity. The equality principle functions to maintain group integrity by preventing differences in member's ability from leading to unequal rewards. Conflict, and possible aggression, can thereby be displaced from the individual level to the group level where it is less immediate and less disruptive. Consequently it is not surprising to find a proverb from the Confucian Analects stating, "不患寡而患不均" (Don't worry about scarcity but about distributing what there is equally.)

Given this reasoning one would expect to find the Chinese tending to use the equality principle when dividing rewards. This expectation was confirmed by Chu and Yang (1976), but only when the subject had performed better than his partner. When the subjects had done worse, they chose equity. Their choice in both cases represented a self-denial which we believe functions to produce group cohesion and prevent individual conflict.

By way of contrast American subjects typically follow the equity principle in such situations. Such choices are consistent with a social philosophy of possessive individualism (McPherson, 1964). Decisions based on equity are legitimized by prevailing values and as such their potential for resulting in open conflict is reduced. With a social philosophy focussed on group maintenance, the Chinese are more likely to follow a general principle of self-sacrifice in distributing resources.

Other Observations of Adult Behavior

Public abuse. As mentioned previously socialization pressures against verbal forms of aggression seem less intense than those against physical

attack. One consequence may be the frequently observed activity of reviling another in public. Arthur Smith gave a lively description of the Chinese practice of Machie (罵街) or "reviling the street". Although Smith observed the practice at the end of last century, it is still widespread. According to Smith (1900/1972):

.. the moment that a quarrel begins abusive words of this sort are poured forth in a filthy stream to which nothing in the English language offers any parallel, and with a virulence and pertinacity suggestive of the fish-women of Billingsgate. it is in constant and almost universal use by all classes and both sexes, always and everywhere. Women use even viler language than men, and continue it longer, The practice of 'reviling the street' is often indulged in by women, who mount the flat roof of the house and shriek away for hours at a time, or until their voices fail. ... If the day is a hot one the reviler bawls as long as he (or she) has breath, then proceeds to refresh himself by a session of fanning, and afterwards returns to the attack with renewed fury. (pp. 219-221)

Chinese vocabulary seems well suited for this type of performance. Although very few publications have dealt with this topic, Eberhard's study (1968) indicates that Chinese has a rich treasure of abusive terms. The most well-developed terms, according to Noboru Niida (1968), a Japanese scholar on Chinese legal history, are the derogatory terms concerning Geschlechtsehre (sexual honor) which hurt Chinese people more than any other type of abuse.

As soon as such a quarrel starts, it attracts the attention of busybodies who play the role of mediator and pass judgment on the dispute. A Chinese proverb says that three mediators are equal to an official, or three blockheads are equal to an above-board man and three above-board men are equal to a magistrate (三個中人當一官, 三個愚人當個明人, 三個明人當個知縣). Thus, the disputants concerned pay attention to

the opinion of the on-lookers, as it is through this agency of social judgment that the issue can be settled.

Surprisingly to some observers, such quarrels rarely turn physical. For example, Kanayama (1978) noted:

In China you can frequently meet wrangling and quarrelling in the street. If they were Japanese they would have already come to blows. The Chinese are just threatening to hit, but rarely do. Instead, the noise is horrible. (p. 111)

Should the quarrel lead to physical assault, the second function of the observers immediately becomes apparent. The following is a description of a family dispute which M. Wolf (1968) regarded as typical:

Gioq-ki (the wife), of course, answered him (her husband) word for word, their verbal exchange disintegrated into a physical one, and the listening neighbors were obliged to enter the house and separate them. Chang (husband) left and Gioq-ki stood on the doorstep yelling curses after him.

It was the stereotype of a Chinese family quarrel, from the listening neighbors to the wife yelling curses at her husband's departing back. Gioq-ki took her neighbor's teasing calmly enough until the neighbor slyly commented on her swollen eyes and hoarse voice, "just like someone who has lost her lover."

This made Gioq-ki angry. "I should have such good luck! Don't worry about me! When he went out, I told him to hurry off and get himself killed." (p. 68)

Thus, the observers become participants, separating those quarrelling before any physical damage can be inflicted and then trying to mollify the combatants. One wonders if such disputes are conducted publicly precisely in order to prevent them from degenerating into physical assault.

If so, then this approach to containing physical assault combined with the socialization practices discussed earlier seems remarkably successful: the victimization rate for serious assault in New York during 1974 was 30.3 times that in Hong Kong during 1978. The same

rate in Los Angeles was 64.8 times higher. (Census and Statistics Department 1979).

We do not know if these types of public quarrels occur more frequently in Chinese societies than in others and whether the incidence of private disputes is concomitantly lower. Given the Chinese concern about physical aggression coupled with the difficulty of resolving conflict in the absence of a recognized authority, we expect so.

Collective violence. Confucian social philosophy functions to maintain the harmony of the in-group. Guidelines for behavior towards members of out-groups are conspicuously lacking. Of the five relationships discussed by Confucius, only that between friends could conceivably extend beyond an established grouping. If we couple these lack of guidelines with the ethnocentrism typically seen in authoritarian social systems (Thomas, 1975), it is not surprising to note numerous examples of seemingly excessive and unrestrained violence against out-group members.

An additional feature of Chinese social structuring is the relative lack of clear boundaries for defining an in-group (Ward, 1968). Even the sense of Chia (家) or family sometimes includes only the members of a nuclear family, but can be extended to include all members of a lineage or a clan. This ambiguity gives disputants considerable lee-way in generating a power base from which to struggle with one another. By appealing to those defined ad hoc as members of the same surname, locality, dialect, occupation or whatever, one can muster considerable support before the battle is fully engaged. Thus considerable attention is always paid by the participants in

a dispute to defining and claiming their respective group memberships, often leading to "classificatory feuding" (Ino, 1901).

In pre-modern China, when the full power of the central government had not penetrated down to the village level, the disputes of people in the countryside often escalated into open feuding. The most common type of feuding in traditional China was the blood feud between two lineages. A typical example is given in Arthur Smith's Village life in China (1890/1970):

A few villagers were returning late on a moonlight night from a funeral in another village. Nearing their own hamlet, they came on two young fellows chopping down small trees of the kind called date (a jujube or rhamnus). They were getting ready clubs for the combined hare-hunt next day. On being hailed, the youths, who were trespassing on the territory of their neighbouring village, fled to their home pursued by the others. The latter returned to their own village and maliciously spread the report that the young men had been cutting pine-trees from the clan graveyard. Although it was late at night a posse was soon raised to go to the other village (about a mile off) and demand satisfaction. The village was asleep, but some headmen were at last aroused who begged their visitors to postpone the matter till daylight, when the case would be looked into and the culprits punished, and any required satisfaction given.

To the reasonable request, only reviling was retorted, and the band returned to their own village filled with fury. A gong was beaten, every man in the village aroused and every male of fit age forced to accompany the mob armed with clubs, poles, etc., to attack the other village. The latter happened to have a mud wall and gates kept closed at night. So large a band made a great noise, and soon aroused their antagonists by their abusive language. The village elders struggled to keep the gates closed, but they were overborne by the hot blood of the youth, who were resolved, since they must have it, to give their assailants all the satisfaction they wanted. The gates once opened, a furious battle ensued, and the women who clambered to the flat-house tops and struggled to see what was going on heard only the dull whacks of heavy blows. Several men were knocked senseless, and on the cry that they had been killed, the battle was renewed until the attacked were driven inside their village, each side having several men wounded, some of them severely. One old man had his skull beaten in with a carrying-pole and was borne home unconscious, in which condition he remained for a week or two.

The next morning the attacking village went out and chopped

down three little pine-trees growing in their own cemetery (as "proof" of the injury done by the other party), and proceeded to the District city to enter a complaint. The other village of course did the same. The first village took with them the old man, unconscious, and apparently in a moribund condition. Each party had to arrange its yamen expenses before a step could be taken, and as the case was a serious one, these were heavy. The Magistrate dared not decide either way until it was seen whether the wounded recovered. An epileptic, half-witted boy captured by one side, who avowed his responsibility for the trouble (perhaps scared nearly to death) was cruelly beaten till he was half dead for so doing. The matter dragged on for a long time, and at length was decided on no principle either of law or of equity - as is the case with so many suits - each side settling its own debts, and neither side winning. The village attacked had squandered at the yamen 300 strings of cash, and the attacking party 500! The old man at last recovered, and peace reigned in Warsaw and its suburbs. (pp. 131-132)

What seems noteworthy in this example is the absence of peaceful modes of conflict resolution between out-groups and the excess of the consequences in proportion to the provocation (Ward, 1970). One can appreciate the often-voiced wish for a strong authority among the Chinese if the consequences of its absence are so extreme.

Since the communist regime took over China in 1949, local villages have been nested within an administrative system that can step in to put down such rural conflicts. Nevertheless, some of the old physical conflicts between local groups still remain (Parish & White, 1978, pp. 308-311), underscoring the power of these traditional in-group-out-group distinctions.

Collective physical attack was also used to punish criminals in the past. Once found guilty, an adulterer or a thief would be attacked by a large band of his villagers, often ruthlessly (Smith, 1900/1972, pp. 194-216). This collective form of physical attack on "the people's enemy" was adopted by the Communists and is a copy of the punishment used against criminals in traditional times. The most striking cases were seen at

public meetings for the struggle against traitors and landlords. The Communist cadres came into a village where there was no class antagonism before to mobilize the masses. The first step was to define the target as a traitor to, or an exploiter of, the community, an out-group member and consequently a non-person against whom violence could thereby be legitimized (Zimbardo, 1970) and where alternative norms of conduct were undeveloped. As soon as the target person was so classified, cadres then mobilized some peasants who would speak out and lead the meeting. Many scenes of these kind of meeting were reported by William Hinton in his book Fanshen (1966). The following is one of the cases:

Wang Ch'ung-lai was an adopted son of the landlord Wang Lai-hsun's mother. Lai-hsun's mother bought a child wife for Ch'ung-lai. The couple were driven out by the family and forced into beggary. They had lived in another village for 20 years. When they heard that the landlords would be brought to account and debts repaid, they hurried home to the village in 1945, and looked forward to the day when the struggle against Lai-hsun would come.

Lai-hsun was brought to the tribune. Ch'ung-lai's wife was standing in the front row. She was the first to speak.

"How was it that you stayed at home while we were driven out?" she asked, stepping in front of the astounded landlord on her small bound feet.

"Because Ch'ung-lai had a grandfather. He had another place to live," said Lai-hsun looking at the ground. He did not have the courage to look her in the face.

"But you too had in-laws. You too had a place to go. Why did you drive us out and make beggars of us? During the famine year we came to beg from you, our own brother, but you gave us nothing. You drove us away with a stick and beat me and the children with an iron poker."

"I remember that day," said Lai-hsun.

"Why?" shouted Ch'ung-lai's wife, tears rolling down her dirt-stained face. "Why?"

"I was afraid if you returned you would ask to divide the property with me."

This answer aroused the whole meeting.

"Beat him, beat him," shouted the crowd.

Ch'ung-lai's wife then took a leather strap from around her wasting body and she and her son beat Lai-hsun with the strap and with their fists. They beat him for more time than it takes to eat a meal and as they beat him Ch'ung-lai's wife cried out, "I beat you in revenge for six years of beatings. In the past

you never cared for us. Your eyes did not know us. Now my eyes do not know you either. Now it is my turn."

Lai-hsun cringed before them and whimpered as the blows fell on his back and neck, then he fainted fell to the ground, and was carried to his home. (pp. 139-140)

Other landlords were beaten to death at large public meetings by aroused groups of their accusers (Hinton, p. 142). The level of public rage mobilized at such meetings can be gauged from the following report of Akiyama (1977):

..... After a public struggle meeting, the landlord (a former village-head) was executed by shooting. The mass rushed to the corpse. Some threw stones at it, some kicked it, and others spit on it. The mass trampled upon the corpse for four hours until the head and the feet were indistinguishable (p. 53)

In contrast to the individual form of public abuse discussed earlier, these types of collective action typically result in physical attack, often of a brutal sort. Given the strong socialization against such physical abuse discussed earlier, it is significant that the physical violence occurs in a group setting. In mass action individual responsibility can be diffused to the other participants, thus lowering restraints against assault (Zimbardo, 1970). In this regard it is interesting to note Sugg's (1975) surprising finding about twenty representative juvenile delinquents in Hong Kong: all twenty committed the act of violence for which they were jailed when accompanied by one or more members of his group, never alone.

Furthermore, the group often provides a legitimizing function for the participants who see themselves acting to protect and maintain the group, be that group the family, the clan, or the proletariat. It is probable that the actors do not construe their actions as "aggressive", but instead see themselves as engaged in a just defense of community interests, a formulation which helps mobilize the instruments of coercive

social control (Tedeschi et al., 1977).

The relative lack of guidelines concerning behavior towards out-group members completes the picture by permitting the violence to occur without opposition from social norms. It is for all these reasons that such a vast proportion of Chinese violence is undertaken by groups and appears unusually excessive and extreme (Smith 1890/1972). One can easily appreciate the terror with which Chinese people regard such violent outbreaks (Ward, 1970).

The use of mediators. We have discussed the Chinese concern about maintaining harmonious community relations. We have also presented examples to underscore the extreme and spiraling violence that often occurs when potential conflicts are not quickly checked. Given this backdrop it is understandable that mediators are extensively used by the Chinese as a strategy for shortcircuiting aggression between contending parties.

The advantages of using a mediator are clear. As Brown (1977) has pointed out, "By separating opposing sides during periods of intense conflict, the likelihood that insult or other affronts will occur may be reduced." (p. 295). In addition, the calling-in of a mediator allows respective parties to disengage without any loss of "face", a well-documented concern of the Chinese (Bond and Lee, 1981). If the mediator has sufficient face, then the mediator's prestige may be used by the leaders of the parties concerned to force a reluctant peace upon their followers. The followers thereby do not lose face in ceasing hostilities because they can construe their peace-making as protecting the mediator's face (Cohen, 1967).

The need for mediators was heightened by the relative absence of civil law and by the Chinese distrust of the "legal" process for resolving disputes.

As we have previously seen, the results of any judgment were often costly to both parties (Gallin, 1967) and the process was usually protracted. Furthermore, Chinese officials were notoriously corrupt (Lau and Lee, 1980), so that the result of any legal action was frequently decided on the basis of which contending party could muster the greater amount of bribery. Thus, one can appreciate the wisdom in the folk proverb, "餓死不作賊, 屈死不告狀" (Better to die of starvation than to become a thief, better to be vexed to death than to bring a lawsuit.) The consequence of this situation was to encourage disputants to seek a quicker and more economical resolution through the offices of a mediator.

Conclusion

We have sampled from a wide selection of sources in this survey of aggression in Chinese people - philosophical writings, folk wisdom, anthropological observations, sociological surveys, and psychological experimentation. We have argued that the fundamental concern of the Chinese has been to maintain the harmony of the in-group, however defined. The source of authority in these groups is not the rule of law but an individual acting as a leader. Consensual validity about the characteristics of these leaders is achieved through traditional Confucian teachings with the consequence that, "長幼有序" (Each person has a ranking). The use of aggressive behavior to challenge these sources of authority is suppressed from an early age. High-density living and low residential mobility contribute their additional inhibiting effects on aggression. The net result is a low incidence of aggressive behaviors that present any challenge to this social ordering, e.g., physical violence towards peers or superiors.

The obverse of this picture is the existence of two dramatic and extreme forms of aggression, public reviling and collective violence towards an out-group. The former, although colorful, has a ritualized quality and rarely leads to physical assault. This is not the case with collective violence where the aggression takes on what Zimbardo (1970) has called a "de-individuated" character -- unrestrained, spiraling, and excessive. Paradoxically, both forms of aggression validate the importance of group membership in controlling the behavior of the actors. Public reviling is public to the group which can then pass judgment on the disputants; collective violence is undertaken by persons acting in a group which

functions to legitimize its members' violence towards those in the out-group.

Such group violence is extremely destructive, as Chinese history testifies. Given the Confucian hierarchical paradigm, however, social harmony can only be realized if one group emerges superior over the other or if both are brought under the authority of a third party. Neither solution is likely to please everybody, but as one Chinese proverb puts the issue, "寧為太平犬,莫作亂世人" (It is better to be a dog enjoying peace than a man in troubled times.)

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Footnotes

¹Indeed, Hofstede's (1980) presentation provides just such an ordering on his dimension of high vs. low power distance. As expected from our analysis of Confucian social structuring, Hofstede's three Chinese samples (from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan) are all located at the high end of this dimension.

²A. Wolf's (1964) report was based on voluminous data collected as an extension of the Six Cultures Study (Whiting and Whiting, 1975) into a Chinese cultural setting. Unfortunately, this gold mine of information remains unanalyzed beyond the 1964 presentation. In a recent meeting with the authors, Wolf recollected that Chinese levels for certain types of physical aggression were higher than comparable American levels. One only wishes that Wolf's data were available in the public domain, so that appropriate modifications could be made in our present analysis. Such changes will clearly be required.