

# *Constructing Chinese Faces in American Classrooms*

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*Among four theoretical approaches to politeness — the social-norm view, the conversational maxim view, the conversational-contract view, and the face-saving view — Chinese students' silence in American classrooms is believed to best explained by the face-saving view, which Brown and Levinson (1987) claim is universal. This paper argues that the Chinese concept of face-saving has different connotations. Through the examples of two Chinese students in American classrooms, this paper reveals why, when, and how Chinese students maintain their faces by handling their silence. It is argued that retaining L1 silence patterns in the L2 can sometimes lead to both cross-cultural misunderstandings and stereotyping, and that Chinese students' transfer of silence in American classrooms as being a polite and face-saving strategy should be understood with cross-cultural sensitivity and respect. Further, Chinese students need to construct their new faces as the result of interaction with others and negotiation of their social identities in the new community.*