

## THE MASK PHENOMENON AND THE CONCEPT OF "FACE" (MIANZI/LIAN) AS MEDIATORS OF SOCIOCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN CHINESE CULTURE

### *Liu Jianzhi*

postgraduate student,  
Ukrainian National  
Academy of Music,  
Kyiv,  
876113273@qq.com

### *Цзяньчжі Лю*

аспірант,  
Національна музична  
академія України,  
м. Київ  
876113273@qq.com

*Abstract.* The article examines the interaction between two cultural categories — the phenomenon of the "mask" and the concept of "face" — understood as mechanisms of sociocultural communication. The aim of the article is to conceptualise the "mask–face" model as a unified cultural mechanism that shapes the interaction between the individual and society, comprising both communicative and moral–ethical dimensions, with particular emphasis on the Chinese cultural context. Drawing on C. G. Jung's psychoanalytic theory of archetypes ("Persona" / "Self") and the Chinese distinction between mianzi (面) and lian (臉), the article proposes an interpretive model in which these notions function as complementary modes of a single cultural communicative structure. It is shown that in the Western humanities the concept of "face" is typically understood as a form of self-presentation and the maintenance of public image, whereas in Chinese culture it operates not only as an indicator of social status (mianzi), but also as a marker of moral integrity and personal dignity (lian). The concepts of E. G. Craig, E. Goffman, and mianzi / lian demonstrate that the mask/face serves as a universal cultural mechanism for organising behaviour and shaping social visibility. In theatre, interpersonal communication, and moral-ethical or hierarchical cultural systems, the mask/face functions as an interface between the individual and a system of cultural meanings, determining one's mode of presence in the world. In the digital age, this mechanism undergoes transformation: the mask becomes detached from the body and emerges as an autonomous avatar, marking a new phase in the evolution of cultural forms of self-representation.

*Keywords:* mask phenomenon, concept of "face", mianzi, lian, Persona, Self, face-work, Über-Marionette.

*Formulation of the problem.* The phenomenon of the mask and the concept of "face" have always attracted attention in the humanities. However, for a long time these cultural categories were examined primarily through the lens of Western interpretation, while the East Asian perspective remained largely overlooked. For this reason, a focused examination of the concept of "face" (*mianzi/lian*) in Chinese culture and its articulation alongside Western understandings of "mask" and "face" within the broader context of sociocultural communication is exceptionally relevant.

*Recent research and publications.* The phenomenon of the

mask and the concept of "face" have repeatedly been examined across various fields of the humanities. Among Western scholarship, the following works are particularly significant: P. Brown and S. C. Levinson (Brown & Levinson, 1992), P. C. Earley (Earley, 1997), E. Goffman (Goffman, 1967), M. Jentsch (Jentsch, 2011), C. G. Jung (Jung, 1966; 1968), J.-P. Sartre (Sartre, 2001), and also Craig's mask theory, particularly the concept of the Über-Marionette (1957).

Special attention has been devoted to the analysis of the Chinese concept of "face" (*mianzi / lian*) in the work of Hu Hsien Chin (Hu, 1944), Hwang Kwang-kuo (Hwang, 1987; 2005), Chen Zhizhao (Chen, 2006), Chou Mei-ling and Ho David Yau-fai (Chou, & Ho, 2006), and Chu Ruey-ling (Chu, 2006). The theoretical and practical cultural aspects of the phenomenon of the face are explored in a special issue of the journal *Sign Systems Studies* (2021).

The transformation of the mask in the digital age is explored in the collective volume *Actor & Avatar: A Scientific & Artistic Catalog* (2023) and in the study by Gao Yang (2023). The analysis of digital corporeality proposed by Zhang Chi (Zhang, 2020) demonstrates a radical extension of the logic embedded in Craig's theatrical mask and Goffman's social mask. In Jiawei Xu's dissertation (Xu, 2024), the phenomenon of the mask is examined in three dimensions — psychological, physical, and virtual.

*The aim of the article* is to conceptualise the "mask-face" model as a unified cultural mechanism that shapes the interaction between the individual and society, comprising both communicative and moral-ethical dimensions, with particular emphasis on the Chinese cultural context.

*Presentation of research material.*

1. *The phenomenon of the mask as the archetype of the "Persona" and the concept of the "face" as the archetype of the "Self": the Jungian dimension.* The mask is one of the oldest cultural phenomena, deeply rooted in the traditions of nearly all societies. It is not only a visual element of religious and state rituals, funerary ceremonies, and theatrical performance, but also a component of communicative practice: a person is often compelled to "put on" a mask in response to social expectations that enforce a distinction between one's "real" face and the supposed "hypocrisy" of the mask. In the modern world, the mask is increasingly ceasing to function as a strictly sacred object and is no longer literally worn on the face, except in theatre and

performance art. Nevertheless, it continues to operate as a kind of protection from others — as a particular manner of conduct or bodily expression — and thus appears as a nonverbal mode of communication between people. In this sense, the idea of the mask primarily concerns the way a person is identified and read by others in interaction. For this reason, the phenomenon of the mask plays a crucial role in the formation of the self, becoming an integral part of subjectivity: an individual shapes their character and "becomes someone" by performing a certain role. The mask here functions as a behavioural model, a mechanism that makes it possible to adapt to specific situations, to uphold a shared value system, to act as a catalyst for social development, and to preserve and transmit cultural experience and collective memory. Gabriele Marino, in the article "*Cultures of the (masked) face*", aptly notes that the "natural face" is not a necessary precondition for the emergence of the "cultural face" and instead operates as one of the possible semiotic masks that an individual may choose to assume (Marino, 2021).

However, it should be emphasized that the phenomenon of the mask, understood as one of the oldest modes of human communication, is both connected with the notion of "face" and at the same time distinct from it. To clarify this relationship, it is necessary to turn to the psychoanalytic theory of archetypes developed by the Swiss psychoanalyst C. G. Jung. Jung regards the Self as the central archetype and writes:

"I have found myself obliged to give the corresponding archetype the psychological name of the 'self' — a term on the one hand definite enough to convey the essence of human wholeness and on the other hand indefinite enough to express the indescribable and indeterminable nature of this wholeness" (Jung, 1968, p. 54). He also offers another well-known definition of the Self: it "is not only the centre but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness" (Jung, 1968, p. 75).

According to Jung, the realisation of the Self is possible only through the process of individuation — a movement "toward oneself" that inevitably leads to an encounter with such archetypes as the Persona,

the Shadow, the Animus, and the Anima. The Swiss thinker notes:

"But with Western man the value of the self sinks to zero. Hence the universal depreciation of the soul in the West" (Jung, 1968, p. 46).

In the context of this article, it is most relevant to focus on two of Jung's archetypes: the Self and the Persona. In our view, the Western understanding of the concept of "face" corresponds to Jung's archetype of the Self, while the phenomenon of the mask corresponds to the archetype of the Persona. However, in traditional Chinese culture the semantics of the concept of "face" are considerably deeper and consist of multiple layers of meaning, which will be examined further in this article.

As C. G. Jung writes,

"The term persona is a very appropriate expression for this, for originally it meant the mask once worn by actors to indicate the role they played" (Jung, 1966, p. 376). He describes the Persona archetype as "a kind of mask [emphasis added — L. Ji.], designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual" (Jung, 1966, p. 264).

That is, the Persona archetype points to an individual's socialisation and sense of identity within society. At the same time, the Persona may also denote a person's desire to differentiate themselves from Others. Jung notes that the Persona has both personal and impersonal components.

Particularly important here is the process by which the self becomes a mask, most often under social pressure. The individual is compelled to inhabit a role imposed by society; the stronger this pressure, the more rapidly the self is transformed into a mask. The mask is often opposed to the face and treated as a sign of falsity or deception. However, this does not mean that the mask possesses only negative qualities: its forms can serve as models of professionalism or leadership. For this reason, the mask remains socially indispensable. It never belongs to one person alone, since it depends on how it is perceived by the Other, from the Other's position. In the encounter between the "I" and the "Other," a communicative field emerges in which their

respective meanings intersect. If we understand the face as the inner image of the person, then the mask can be seen as the image of that image — a second-order reflection of the inner self.

Moreover, in the process of individuation there is a constant tension between inner wholeness (the Self) and external socialisation (the Persona). This alignment can occur in two ways. Either the individual articulates their own values and, on this basis, constructs a Persona as an authentic expression of the self; or the individual begins by performing a socially required role and, through enacting that role, arrives at an awareness of the Self. When the Persona can be regarded as mature, the mask becomes an expression of the Self within the social world.

2. *The phenomenon of masks and the concept of "face" in Chinese culture: mianzi and lian.* A natural question arises: how does this relate to the phenomenon of the mask and to the concept of "face" in Chinese culture? In Chinese tradition, the concept of "face" has a dual structure, expressed through *mianzi* (面子) and *lian* (臉). Both terms are fundamental for understanding social norms of behaviour in China, which are tied to respect for the dignity of the other person. When we speak of *mianzi*, we are referring to a person's reputation in society — how they are perceived and evaluated by others. When we speak of *lian*, we are talking about personal human dignity and moral integrity — how a person evaluates themselves. Therefore, it may be assumed that *mianzi* corresponds to the Jungian term Persona, while *lian* is correlated with the Self.

In the everyday life of Chinese society, both *mianzi* and *lian* continue to shape the rules of interpersonal communication. At the same time, the loss of *lian* is considered far more damaging than the loss of *mianzi*, because it implies the loss of a person's moral authority. For this reason, the modern Chinese writer Lu Xun (early 20th century), in his essay "On Face," remarks that "it constitutes the very essence of the Chinese spirit" (Xun, 1934). He also observes that this notion is so deeply internalised that many Chinese understand it intuitively and rarely feel the need to articulate it explicitly. Of course, the idea of "face" describes a social phenomenon that exists not only in China but in any society. The question, then, is what makes this concept distinctive in the Chinese context.

This distinction was first elaborated in detail by the Chinese anthropologist Hu Hsien Chin in her essay "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face'" (Hu, 1944), where

she analyses set expressions in Chinese that use the terms *mianzi* and *lian*. She writes:

"One of these, *mien-tzŭ*, stands [for] the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. This is prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever maneuvering. For this kind of recognition ego is dependent at all times on his external environment. The other kind of "face," *lien*, is also known to Americans without being accorded formal recognition. It is the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfill his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being. It represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for it to function properly within the community. *Lien* is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction" (Hu, 1944, p. 45).

Hu provides twenty-one examples of phrases containing *mianzi* and five containing *lian* in a wide range of social contexts. This demonstrates that the concept of "face" includes numerous subtle nuances that are not always transparent to Western observers. Hu argues that *lian* refers to the community's trust in the moral character of the individual. When a person begins to disregard traditional behavioural norms, they force the surrounding community to doubt their moral integrity and to question their capacity to fulfill their expected social roles.

"This 'loss of *lien*' puts ego outside the society of decent human beings and threatens it with isolation and insecurity. *Lien* is not only an external sanction for behavior that violates moral standards, but constitutes an internal sanction as well... In extreme cases the realisation that one's conduct has been damned by group standards drives an individual to suicide" (Hu, 1944, p. 61).

Hu Hsien Chin emphasises that the notion of *mianzi* is inextricably linked to the notion of a social role. Once an individual accepts such a role, they also accept the behavioural expectations and social

obligations that accompany it. Crucially, Hu argues that the adopted role effectively becomes a form of self-evaluation that must be protected in order to maintain social order. If *mianzi* is interpreted as a "mask" in the negative sense of concealing one's true "face," it is important to stress that it is not merely deception; rather, it functions as a fundamental element of interpersonal relations in China. *Mianzi* defines the social standing a person occupies on the basis of their character and authority within a given group. At the same time, *mianzi* is always relational: according to Confucian ethics, there is a shared responsibility not to undermine the dignity and standing of others. In other words, causing someone else to "lose face" simultaneously damages one's own standing. Thus, it concerns a shared, collective prestige the preservation of which is the responsibility not of a single person alone, but of the community as a whole.

For example, when a Chinese host says farewell to a guest, they will at minimum accompany the guest to the door as a sign of respect. If the guest is relatively important, they may accompany them further, perhaps to the lift. A particularly honoured guest will be escorted all the way to the car, or even further. This illustrates that "saving face" operates as a subtle social practice that requires careful attention to relative status and role. In other words, it is a way of signalling appropriate respect to friends, associates, or business partners.

At the end of her essay, Hu Hsien Chin concludes:

"That *lien* and *mien-tzŭ* constitute separate concepts is well shown in the difference of reaction to the expressions 'to have no *lien*' and 'to have no *mien-tzŭ*.' The former is the worst insult, casting doubt on the integrity of ego's moral character; the latter signifies merely the failure of ego to achieve a reputation through success in life. Again, 'to want *mien-tzŭ*' is by no means the opposite of 'not to want *lien*'" (Hu, 1944, p. 61).

The doctoral dissertation of the German scholar Markus Jentsch, *The Power of "Face": Selected Aspects of the "Face" Concept Illustrated by Case Studies from the People's Republic of China (1978–2010) (Im Banne des "Gesichts": Ausgewählte Aspekte des "Gesichts" — Konzepts vorgestellt anhand von Fallbeispielen aus der Volksrepublik China aus der Zeitspanne 1978–2010)* (Jentsch, 2011), is of particular interest. It offers a

thorough analysis of the concept of "face," not only through a range of Eastern and Western theoretical approaches, but also through a wealth of illustrative examples drawn from everyday life in China and from Chinese sociocultural traditions (Jentsch, 2011). Jentsch draws attention to the further development of ideas first articulated by Hu Hsien Chin, especially in the work of Taiwanese scholars such as Hwang Kwang-kuo (Hwang, 1987; Hwang, 2005) and Chu Ruey-ling (Chu, 2006). In addition, he relies on the work of Chen Zhi-zhao (Chen, 2006), who proposes her own definition of "face" as the self-image of an individual — an image that acquires meaning in society or in interpersonal relations on the basis of those qualities that are socially valued. Chen does not interpret "face" primarily in terms of formal social status, but rather as "a distinctive quality that commands respect." Accordingly, in Chen's view, "face" is subject to the subjective evaluation of an observer and is situationally determined (Chen, 2006, p. 133).

Particular attention should also be paid to the study *An Analysis of the Content of the Concept of "Face" and Its Functioning in Social Interaction from an Intercultural Perspective* by Taiwanese sociologist Mei-Ling Chou, who works in the field of intercultural communication, and her colleague, the social psychologist of Chinese origin Ho David Yau-fai (Chou & Ho, 2006). These researchers argue that there are currently two main definitions of "face" in the academic literature, both of which emerged within a Western analytical framework. The first definition draws on Erving Goffman's *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (Goffman, 1967) and P. Brown and S. C. Levinson's *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Brown, & Levinson, 1992). In this account, Chou and Ho characterise "face" as a psychological construct centred on self-presentation and on the recognition of one's self-image in the eyes of others. The second definition treats "face" as a sociological construct. In this case, the term refers to how others perceive an individual's social status, prestige, authority, and influence in society. Proponents of this approach include Hu Hsien Chin, Hwang Kwang-kuo, and Chu Ruey-ling (Chou, & Ho, 2006, p. 192). Chou and Ho therefore describe "face" as "a socio-psychological construct rooted in culture" (Chou, & Ho, 2006, p. 196). They argue that there is a communicative interplay between, on the one hand, the self as it is actively presented, and, on the other,

the way this self is perceived and evaluated by others. Both components, they claim, are fundamental to understanding what "face" is.

Markus Jentsch draws attention to the work of Ho David Yau-fai, "On the Concept of Face," in which "face" is defined as "the respect and/or honor that a person demands from others" (Ho, 1976, p. 883). According to Ho, "face" is the appraisal of an individual by others. It is grounded in how consistently a person behaves in the eyes of others, as well as in what others expect from that person. Ho argues that interpersonal communication is always a reciprocal exchange of recognition and respect; therefore, the concept of "face" emerges within relationships as a form of mutual recognition (Ho, 1976). Jentsch notes that, compared to the Western definitions mentioned above, Ho's formulation captures the Chinese understanding of "face" more precisely. Ho emphasises that its essential feature is the significance of the Other — that is, the surrounding social world — because "orientation toward other people" (*taren quxiang* 他人向) is crucial to the maintenance of face (Jentsch, 2011, p. 31).

In China, the concept of "face" is closely connected not only to *mianzi* and *lian*, but also to the notion of *guanxi* (關係), which refers to interpersonal ties that integrate hierarchical positioning with interpersonal closeness and mutual trust. The roots of *guanxi* lie in family-based relational ethics that, in contemporary China, continue the Confucian tradition. This Confucian model of kinship ethics extends beyond the family and structures broader social interaction.

3. Craig — Goffman — *mianzi/lian*: *Cultural Modes of Mask and Face in Western, Eastern, and Digital Contexts*. Returning to definitions proposed by Western scholars, it is useful to consider the already cited work *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (1967) by the American sociologist and social anthropologist Erving Goffman. Goffman writes that "face" "may be defined 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 — albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Another American sociologist and psychologist, P. Christopher Earley, in his work *Face, Harmony, and Social Structure: An Analysis of Organizational Behavior across Cultures*

(1997), writes: " 'Face' is a fundamental part of human interaction. It is the way we present ourselves to others; it determines how we are judged and how we want to be perceived by others" (Earley, 1997, p. 42).

If these two definitions are compared, it becomes possible to speak of two kinds of "face": an "inner face" and an "outer face", each of which has its own communicative and symbolic function. The "inner face" is more closely connected with the notion of *lian* and with the Self of the individual, which, according to C. G. Jung, is the inner personality that exists within the unconscious and governs how a person lives, what guides them, and how they relate to the pursuit of psychic wholeness and inner development. In other words, as already noted, this corresponds to what Jung calls individuation — the process through which the personality strives towards inner completeness. This is also consistent with J.-P. Sartre's view of the self as the result of an individual's free choice (Sartre, 2001). The "outer face" corresponds to the Chinese concept of *mianzi* and to Jung's archetype of the Persona. However, it cannot be maintained that any individual possesses only a single face, even when the "outer face" takes on the form of a mask. In this respect, Goffman's observation is particularly apt: "A person may be said to have, or be in, or maintain face." He defines face as "an image of [a person] that is internally consistent, that is supported by judgements and evidence conveyed by other participants, and that is confirmed by evidence conveyed through impersonal agencies in the situation" (Goffman, 1967, pp. 6–7).

Goffman introduces the concept of "face-work" and explains it as follows:

"By face-work I mean to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract 'incidents' — that is, events which threaten face by their effective symbolic implications." (Goffman, 1967, p. 12).

Goffman distinguishes two "basic kinds of face-work": "the avoidance process" and "the corrective process", as well as an important element of face-work, namely *poise*. He understands "the avoidance process" as the effort to prevent situations in which "face" might be damaged — that is, avoiding actions, remarks, or circumstances that could place a person in an embarrassing position, expose their weaknesses,

or diminish their status. "The corrective process", by contrast, is a ritual through which participants in an interaction work to restore damaged face: it involves acknowledging the face-threatening offence, offering repair, and having that repair accepted. *Poise* refers to the ability to maintain one's composure and dignity in any situation and to avoid displaying confusion or loss of control — in other words, a capacity often captured by the expression "to save face / to maintain face".

When comparing the Chinese concept of "face" (*mianzi / lian*) with Goffman's notion of "face-work", both similarities and differences can be observed. With regard to similarities, first, it is important to note the verbal and non-verbal actions through which "face" is maintained in the course of interaction between the self and the Other. Second, both frameworks pay particular attention to the risk of "losing face", which may disrupt communication between individuals. Third, in both Western and East Asian cultural traditions, the concept of "face" reflects moral and ethical expectations concerning proper behaviour in society, and signals an individual's social status and dignity.

As for the differences, it should be emphasised that in the Western tradition the concept of "face" tends to be divided into either a "social" construct or a "psychological" construct. By contrast, the East Asian tradition fuses these dimensions into a single "socio-psychological" construct, understood as an integrated system of moral and ethical norms and values, and functioning as an "invisible mask" worn by each individual. This semantic framework generates a distinctive "mask code" of social behaviour in China — one that is more deeply embedded than the idea of the mask as merely a theatrical or ritual object. The Chinese concept of "face" regulates not only interpersonal relations, but also entire institutional and cultural systems, including politics, business, and family relations.

In our view, Goffman's theory of "face-work" presents social interaction as a sequence of public "performances" and managed self-images, in which the personality emerges less as an inner essence and more as an outcome of a successfully enacted role. This creates a conceptual bridge to the theatrical ideas of the English director and theorist Gordon Craig, who emphasised the priority of form, rhythm, and symbolic imagery over the actor's individual emotionality. Craig's mask theory took shape within the context of modernist European theatre and reveals the artistic, metaphorical, and culturally significant dimensions of the mask as a phenomenon.

For Craig, the mask is not merely an object or external ornament; it is a cultural sign that structures the actor's behaviour, regulates their physical presence within a semiotic system, and transforms individual expression into symbolic form. In effect, Craig constructs an artistic and aesthetic model of the same cultural process that, in the Chinese tradition, operates as social regulation through "face" (*mianzi/lian*), and that Goffman conceptualises as public role-playing. In Craig's understanding, the mask embodies what manifests in everyday culture as "face": a generalised, supra-individual form of a role that does not reduce to personal traits and that defines one's mode of presence in the world. Thus, the mask not only modifies behaviour but also establishes its rhythm, boundaries, and meaning. It demonstrates a broader cultural principle: the individual is always subject to interpretation, and identity is formed and gains significance only through interaction with others, within a framework of specific social, symbolic, and aesthetic conventions.

Moreover, the English theorist introduces into the scholarly discourse the concept of the *Über-Marionette*, which functions as a metaphor: it does not deny the human, embodied actor, yet it simultaneously reflects Craig's own vision of the body. In Craig's view, the dominant realist model of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Western theatre — striving for a "photographic" reproduction of reality — not only rigidly constrained and distorted the actor's bodily expressivity, but also mercilessly exposed the natural imperfections of the human body. Craig believed that theatre should operate through generalised, symbolic action rather than reproducing everyday life. Thinking in the spirit of Symbolism, he maintained that the actor must return to the stage as a "new material" — the *Über-Marionette* — and "come to life" in a transformed artistic quality. As Craig writes:

"They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture" (Craig, 1957, p. 61),

and

"The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure — the *Über-marionette* we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name" (Craig, 1957, p. 81).

It is worth noting that, in contemporary humanities

discourse, the concepts of the mask and the face are increasingly understood as interfaces between the body, social interaction, and technological reality. Moreover, as Jörg Sternagel and Dieter Mersch observe,

"To mix semiotics, the face becomes a mask that hides nothing but elevates everything, is no longer bound to a body, an available subject, a prior signifier — because the face is the mask itself" (Sternagel, & Mersch, 2023, p. 212).

Craig's theatre, Goffman's social theory, and the Chinese concepts of *mianzi / lian*, despite their different origins, delineate a shared semiotic space in which the mask operates as a mediator between the individual and the structure, between corporeality and the sign system, between physical presence and the imagined image. In Craig's theory, the mask and the *Über-Marionette* express a desire to transform the actor's body into a purified bearer of artistic form, freed from contingent emotions and psychological mimicry. The mask disciplines and shapes stage corporeality, turning it into a material sign through which not the actor's personal "I" speaks, but rather the meaning, structure, and style of the work become manifest. Within such an aesthetic logic, the actor's presence becomes a kind of interface, since the body is inscribed into a higher semiotic structure.

Goffman, in describing the mechanisms of "face-work", effectively proposes a social analogue of this theatrical paradigm. In his conception, the face is a public mask that an individual is obliged to maintain in interaction with others, demonstrating control, adherence to norms, and predictability of behaviour. Just as Craig's mask shapes the actor's stage body, according to Goffman the social "face" shapes the behavioural "repertoire", determining what may be displayed, concealed, or corrected. In this sense, the face functions as an interface — a social surface on which the individual communicates their acceptability and legitimacy.

The Chinese tradition of *mianzi / lian* deepens this model by adding moral and hierarchical dimensions. Unlike Goffman's Western, individual-centred notion of face, in the Eastern tradition it is not merely a social mask but a culturally codified sign through which the community evaluates a person according to their moral qualities. Thus, the mask/face becomes both a mechanism of social control and a means of preserving harmony within the community.

All these approaches become further radicalised in the contemporary world of transhumanism and posthumanism. In the doctoral study of Jiawei Xu (Xu, 2024), it is shown that the mask, regardless of its form, functions as a mediator between the individual, the constructed image, and the audience, while in contemporary branding practices it operates as a programmable interface. Another Chinese scholar, Zhang Chi (Chi, 2020), argues that in the posthuman era the performer shifts from "bodily presence" to "algorithmic visibility." In this framework, the cyborg-actor and the virtual idol embody a condition in which the mask detaches from its physical bearer and begins to exist as an autonomous digital subjectivity. In this sense, the virtual idol can be seen as a technological realisation of Craig's Über-Marionette — a "purified" form of performer, liberated from the contingencies of human corporeality yet endowed with a new semiotic potency within media culture. In the digital environment, the mask detaches from the body and begins to exist as an autonomous carrier of identity — as an avatar, a virtual idol, or a holographic performer. Here, as Y. Gao argues, there is a shift from "the body as an interface" to "the interface as a body" (Gao, 2023, p. 145), since presence no longer requires physical flesh, and the social or artistic-aesthetic "face" exists solely as a cultural code, a set of parameters, an algorithmic image. If according to Craig the mask disciplined the body, then in digital culture it replaces it. If according to Goffman the face required mutual confirmation, in cyberspace it is sustained by algorithms. And if in the Chinese tradition the face serves as a bearer of ethical status, in virtual reality it may be reproduced and modified independently of the subject's actual behaviour.

*Conclusions.* The study has made it possible to address a gap in existing scholarship, in which the mediating function of the phenomenon of the "mask" and the concept of "face" has not yet been adequately described, namely their role as a connecting link between the individual, their identity, and the social order within traditional Chinese culture. The proposed "mask-face" model affirms the idea of two mutually complementary modes within a single communicative structure of human sociocultural existence, understood as a shared cultural mechanism. The mask, understood as a phenomenon that in the contemporary cultural sphere is shifting from the sacred and ritual dimension into the realm of behavioural strategies, functions as a mediator between the "I" and others. It enables

adaptation to the surrounding social environment, serves as a mechanism for the formation of moral values, acts as an accumulator of collective experience, and operates as an instrument of the individual's social integration into society.

The use of C. G. Jung's psychoanalytic theory has made it possible to understand the duality of the "mask-face" and to interpret them in terms of the archetypes "Persona" and "Self." It has been established that the archetype of the Self is embodied in the concept of "face," which emphasises inner wholeness, existential completeness, and inherent moral values — that is, that toward which the person strives in the process of individuation. The archetype of the Persona, by contrast, represents the outward dimension of a person's socialisation and is directed towards the individual's participation in the social sphere. Thus, the ongoing alignment between the Self and the Persona makes it possible to possess both a face and a mask simultaneously.

Appeal to the Chinese tradition adds an entirely different dimension to the understanding of the phenomenon of the mask and the concept of "face", since it does not reduce the latter to either a social or an individual image. An analysis of the work of Hu Hsien Chin and her successors demonstrates the inseparability of the notions *mianzi* (面子) — social prestige or status — and *lian* (臉) — the individual's moral and ethical values. It has been shown that *lian* approaches what, in Jungian terminology, would be called the Self, whereas *mianzi* functions in a way similar to the Persona. However, such parallels remain incomplete, because in the Chinese model the "outer" and the "inner" do not exist in separate domains, as in Western psychology, but are understood instead as different facets of a single, integrated socio-ethical model.

This approach fundamentally distinguishes the Chinese understanding of the concept of "face" from most Western approaches. In particular, according to E. Goffman and P. Christopher Earley, the concept is understood primarily as a public image. By contrast, in the Chinese tradition, "face" is not only the individual's presentation of themselves, but also a kind of test of morality and dignity — an ability to conduct oneself properly within society. Moreover, it is not merely a private matter for the individual, but a shared responsibility of the entire community.

The combination of Western and Eastern traditions makes it possible to trace a shared trajectory in the

evolution of the mask: from an artistic instrument, through the notion of "face" as a social mechanism, to the digital avatar as a self-sufficient bearer of identity. In all these cases, the mask functions as a structure that organises behaviour, coordination, and cultural communication; it is not merely an aesthetic ornament but an operational matrix that defines the boundaries of what is visible and permissible. In Craig's theory, the mask disciplines the actor's corporeality, elevating it to the level of symbolic gesture; in Goffman's framework, "face-work" shapes the social scenography of everyday life; in the Chinese context, *mianzi/lian* operates as a deep cultural code governing social hierarchy, mutual responsibility, and honour. All three models

represent different historical and cultural strategies for addressing the same fundamental problem — how a person constructs, maintains, and manages their presence in the world. The emergence of the concept of the "*Cyber Über-Marionette*" marks a new stage in this evolution: a shift to a condition in which human presence becomes increasingly detached from the physical body and is realised within the cultural sphere as symbolic, informational, and sometimes fully autonomous digital forms. In this sense, the cyberbody no longer reflects the human being but creates an alternative ontology of subjectivity, in which the mask becomes a universal interface between the individual, technology, and society.

#### Bibliography:

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1992). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Z.-z. [Chen, Zhizhao / 陳之昭]. (2006). *Mianzi xinli de lilun fenxi yu shizheng yanjiu* 面子心理的理論分析與實證研究 [Face psychology: A theoretical analysis and an empirical study] (original work published 1988). In X. W. Zhai (Ed.), *Mianzi yu wenhua* 面子文化 [Face and culture] (pp. 107–160). Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe. (in Chinese)
- Chou, M.-l., & Ho, D. Y.-f. (2006). *Cong kuawenhua de guandian fenxi mianzi de neihan ji qi zai shehui jiaowang zhong de yunzuo* 從跨文化的觀點分析面子的內涵及其在社會交往中的運作 [An analysis of the content of the concept of "face" and its functioning in social interaction from an intercultural perspective] (original work published 1992). In X. W. Zhai (Ed.), *Mianzi yu wenhua* 面子文化 [Face and culture] (pp. 186–216). Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe. (in Chinese)
- Chu, R.-l. [Chu, Ruyi-ling / 朱瑞玲]. (2006). *Mianzi yali ji qi yinying xingwei* 面子壓力及其因應行為 [Face pressure and coping behavior] (original work published 1991). In X. W. Zhai (Ed.), *Mianzi yu wenhua* 面子文化 [Face and culture] (pp. 161–185). Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe. (in Chinese)
- Craig, E. G. (1957). *On the art of the theatre*. William Heinemann. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/ontheartofthethe030294mbp>
- Earley, P. C. (1997). *Face, harmony, and social structure: An analysis of organizational behavior across cultures*. Oxford University Press.
- Gao, Y. (2023). Cyber über-marionette: The overcoming of Gordon Craig's views on the body in the age of posthumanism. *Wenyi Lilun Yanjiu* 文艺理论研, 2023(3), 137–147. (in Chinese)
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gramigna, R., & Leone, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Cultures of the face* [Special issue]. *Sign Systems Studies*, 49(3–4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/49.3-4>
- Ho, D. Y.-f. [He Youhui / 何友暉]. (1976). On the concept of face. *American Journal of Sociology*, 81(4), 867–884.
- Hu, H. C. (1944). The Chinese concepts of "face." *American Anthropologist*, 46(1, Part 1), 45–64. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/662926>
- Hwang, K.-K. [Huang, Guangguo / 黃光國]. (1987). Face and favor: The Chinese power game. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(4), 944–974.
- Hwang, K.-K. [Huang, Guangguo / 黃光國]. (2005). Huaren shehui zhong de lianmian guan 華人社會中的臉面觀 [The concept of "face" in Chinese society]. In G.-S. Yang (Ed.), *Huaren bentu xinlixue* 華人本土心理學 [Chinese indigenous psychology] (Vol. 1, pp. 365–405). Taipei: Da Guan Chuban Shiye Youxian Gongsi. (in Chinese)
- Jentsch, M. (2011). *Im Banne des "Gesichts": Ausgewählte Aspekte des "Gesichts"-Konzepts vorgestellt anhand von*

- Fallbeispielen aus der Volksrepublik China aus der Zeitspanne 1978–2010* [Doctoral dissertation, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg]. (in German)
- Jung, C. G. (1966). *Two essays on analytical psychology* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.; 2nd ed.). In *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 7). Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <https://jungiancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Vol-7-two-essays-on-analytical-psychology.pdf>
- Jung, C. G. (1968). *Psychology and alchemy* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 12). Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <https://maypoleofwisdom.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/collected-works-of-c.g.-jung-volume-12-psychology-and-alchemy-pdfdrive-.pdf>
- Marino, G. (2021). *Cultures of the (masked) face*. *Sign Systems Studies*, 49(3–4), 318–337. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2021.49.3-4.04>
- Sartre, J.-P. (2001). *Buttia i nishcho: Narys fenomenologichnoi ontolohii* [Being and Nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology] (V. Liakh & P. Tarashchuk, Trans.). Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Solomii Pavlychko "Osnovy." (in Ukrainian)
- Sternagel, J., & Mersch, D. (2023). Mask, face, countenance. In D. Mersch, A. Rey, T. Grunwald, J. Sternagel, L. Kegel, & M. L. Loertscher (Eds.), *Actor & avatar: A scientific & artistic catalog* (Subtexte 27, pp. 205–214). transcript Verlag. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839466244>
- Xu, J. (2024). *Unmasking masks! An analysis of psychological, physical, and virtual masks as applied to intellectual property (IP) character design in branding and marketing strategies* (Professional doctoral dissertation, University of Wales Trinity Saint David).
- Xun, Lu [鲁迅]. (October 4, 1934). *Shuo "mianzi" 說〈面子〉* [Say "Face"], *Manhua shenghuo 漫画生活* [Comics Life Monthly]. Vol. 2, p. 28.
- Zhang, C. (2020). *Post-body conditions: From "cyborg actor" to virtual idol* [后身体境况—从“赛博格演员”到虚拟偶像]. *Film Art*, 1, 94–99. (in Chinese)

### Лю Цзяньчжі

#### Феномен маски та концепт «обличчя» (mianzi/lian) як медіатори соціокультурної комунікації в китайській культурі

*Анотація.* Стаття досліджує взаємодію двох культурних категорій — феномена «маски» та концепту «обличчя», осмислених як механізми соціокультурної комунікації. Метою статті є осмислення моделі «маска – обличчя» як єдиного культурного механізму, що формує взаємодію між індивідом і соціумом та містить водночас комунікативний і морально-етичний виміри, з особливою увагою до китайського культурного контексту. Спираючись на психоаналітичну теорію архетипів К. Г. Юнга («Персона»/«Самість») та китайське розмежування понять mianzi (面子) і lian (臉), у статті пропонуємо інтерпретаційну модель, у якій ці поняття функціонують як взаємодоповнювальні модули єдиної культурної комунікативної структури. Показано, що в західній гуманітаристиці концепт «обличчя» здебільшого розглядається як форма самопрезентації та підтримання публічного іміджу, тоді як у китайській культурі він постає не лише індикатором соціального статусу (mianzi), а й маркером моральної цілісності та особистої гідності (lian). Концепції Е. Г. Крега, Е. Гоффмана та mianzi/lian демонструють, що маска/обличчя функціонує як універсальний культурний механізм організації поведінки та формування соціальної видимості. У театрі, міжособистісній комунікації та морально-етичних чи ієрархічних культурних системах маска/обличчя постає інтерфейсом між індивідом і системою культурних смислів, визначаючи спосіб його присутності у світі. У цифрову епоху цей механізм зазнає суттєвої трансформації: маска відокремлюється від тіла й постає як автономний аватар, що позначає новий етап еволюції культурних форм самопредставлення.

*Ключові слова:* феномен маски, концепт «обличчя», mianzi, lian, Персона, Самість, face-work, Über-Marionette.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 17.11.2025.

Стаття прийнята до друку після рецензування 01.12.2025

Стаття оприлюднена 31.12.2025