

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF CHINESE CULTURE**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of Chinese Culture and will discuss about selected cultural aspects that form the basis of the five values for the modified version of the Nostrand Emergent Model for culture analysis in this present study. Many scholars and writers of Chinese Culture have written treatises and books on certain aspects of it but the review of literature for this chapter will only focus on a broad spectrum of Chinese Culture covering the following five aspects, namely, love and marriage, food, family, Chinese etiquette as well as education and knowledge.

#### **3.1 Chinese Cultural Development and Practices**

China, the seat of Chinese culture, has a cultural development spanning thousands of years. According to Lip (1993) as far back as the sixteenth century B.C., the casting of bronze, jade carving and lacquering were relatively advanced. Building techniques and other art forms were started as early as the eleventh century.

The ancient Chinese people were deeply religious and worshipped all sorts

of deities including natural forces, mythical animals and strange spirits. Paying respect to ancestors started hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. However, in the sixth and seventh centuries B.C., they accepted the philosophies of Confucius and Lao Zi (Lee 1986, Lip 1993). By the time of Confucius, primitive religious practices were modified and Confucianism was sanctioned. The philosophies of Confucius and Lao Zi had a great impact on Chinese culture in the areas of natural science, architecture and social practices. The teachings of Confucius, a sixth century B.C. philosopher, greatly influenced the organization of Chinese society and political system from the 6th century till the Qing dynasty.

Confucius taught the meaning of *ren* (magnanimity), *yi* (righteousness) and *dao de* (virtue). Hence, the foundation of Chinese society was based on the teaching of Confucius and his disciples. Lip (1993) states that in the past, scholars studied the four books which were as follows: *The Book of Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of Mean*, *The Analects* and *The Book of Mencius*; and a collection of six classics which comprised *The Book of Odes*, *The Annals of Spring and Autumn*, *The Book of Rites* and *The Book of Music*.

Lip (1993) states that the teaching of Confucius molded the planning of houses, palaces and temples while Daoism propagated by Lao Zi reinforced the central Chinese thinking on harmony of *yin* and *yang* and the balance of the five elements such as gold, wood, water, fire and earth. Lip (1993)

states that the theory of *yin* and *yang* is still applied to the naming of a newborn child today.

Lip (1993) continues that to the Chinese, each person has a well defined place in society. The oldest male occupies the position as head of a family and he is responsible for the well being of the entire household. His wife who is in charge of the household is not expected to earn an income. Property is to be inherited by sons as they perpetuate the family name. If a man has no sons, his fortune will be inherited by his next of kin, namely his brother's sons. However, this practice has been discontinued today. In the past, the father would look after his son's welfare while the son gave his father respect in return. The Chinese community, in the past, was based on the extended family, comprising parents, children and relatives. Each individual in the extended family system had a definite place and role. Disloyalty to the country was unthinkable as the existence of the country made the family possible. With the advent of modernization, Ingram and Ng (1995) observe that there are very few, if any extended style of family living in the Chinese Community today.

Chinese cultural achievements in the arts have developed for over thousands of years. Ancient porcelain ware have provided evidence that poetic composition existed from as early as 6,000 years ago. Lip (1993) reports that the art of painting was cultivated before the 6th century while porcelain making began as early as 7th century A.D. The last 5,000 years of Chinese

cultural history has manifested itself richly in philosophy and classics, arts and architecture, music and performing arts, religious practices and beliefs, martial arts and literary pursuits, eating and drinking and every aspect of life itself. Lip (1993) shares a similar view with Lee (1983) that the yardstick to measure a cultured Chinese person in the past, was his accomplishments in the martial arts, calligraphy and brush painting, Chinese opera, culinary skills and his skill in playing the various Chinese instruments.

Among the important events celebrated by the Chinese are the birth of a child, marriage and death. According to Lip (1993), the most important time of the year is the first day in the Chinese Lunar calendar which is called by all Chinese as *xin nian* [New Year]. However, the origins of the new year is shrouded in myth and one source named it after a mythical animal called *nian*. Another festival that is celebrated by the Chinese is the moon festival which is known as the lantern festival celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. Presently, the festivals and cultural activities described above are still practiced in many parts of China as well as outside China.

### **3.2 Selected Themes in Chinese Culture**

The following themes have been selected from a wide spectrum of themes inherent in Chinese Culture as they are considered important by various authorities on Chinese Culture. These selected themes form the requirement to the use of a particular framework for the analysis of culture based on

Howard L. Nostrand's (1974) Emergent Model. Hence, the aim of the thesis is to look into these five areas. It is in no way exhaustive as it is a reflection of the researcher's work in constructing a model for the analysis of culture.

### **3.2.1 Love and Marriage**

Love and marriage, which is a universal theme for all cultures, has been selected as one of the five themes for this study since it is attested as one of the most three important events in a Chinese person's life (Lip 1993:15). Tung (1961:91) quotes the ancient text, *Li Chi* for the meaning of marriage. Marriage is "a bond of affection between two surnames. It serves the ancestral temple as well as continues the family line." This ancient and authoritative definition states the family as the greatest concern, not the individual. Perpetuation of the family line and ancestor worship are linked together. It is said that the family line has to be perpetuated so the ancestors can be sacrificed to. Without descendants, the ancestors would become unworshipped ghosts as they would have no descendants to offer them sacrifices. Tung (1961) refers to the *Li Chi*, an ancient text of Confucianism, which defines the ceremony of marriage as ancestor worship as it is the first and last purpose of marriage.

Ancient wedding rituals, according to Lip (1993), were attributed to Zhou Gong, a prince who lived during the reign of Zhou Wu Wang (1066 - 1063 B.C.) He set up the rules on the book of rites for the union of Chinese

couples. According to tradition it was not necessary for a young couple to meet and fall in love before the marriage because the purpose of marriage was to perpetuate the family line. A marriage was to "*nei shuo zhi yan, fu mu zhi ming*" [listen to the marriage broker and obey the commands of your parents].

To summarize, according to Chinese tradition, the purpose of marriage is to maintain the family line so that the ancestors can be sacrificed to. Tung (1961) concludes that ancestor worship was the first and last purpose of marriage. This tradition is still adhered to by many Chinese today.

### **3.2.2 Food**

Lip (1993) states that the Chinese have developed an exquisite cuisine and regard food as the most important item in a man's life. Thus, they do not greet each other with the conventional greeting of "How are you?", but "Have you eaten?". Lip continues that the above greeting is given not out of a desire to know if the person has eaten but whether he or she is feeling quite well. Hong-Kingston (1977) noted that regardless if the Chinese person has eaten or not, s/he will answer in the affirmative. Therefore, food has been added as one of the five themes in the component for the analysis of Chinese culture.

Consequently, Lee (1986) states that a deeper understanding of the art of

eating can only be obtained through knowledge of the philosophy of food. Lip (1993) points to the fact that Chinese cuisine is a three thousand-year-old art which incorporates the principles of *yin* and *yang* qualities in the food. Each vegetable and meat is classified in terms of *yin* and *yang* and cooking them involves a combination of *yin* and *yang* so that each cooked dish is balanced.

Lee (1986) states that food is viewed by the Chinese in a broad sense as anything that nourishes the system is regarded as food. Clayre (1984) quotes Yuen Mei (1716-98), one of the best-known gourmets in Chinese literature, to highlight on the appearance and taste of food. "A good dish strikes the nose and eyes first . . . Its flowery flavour tells the secret before being tested by the mouth and tongue." Clayre discusses about the three appeals of food - to sight, to smell and to taste - in that order which is still spoken of by the Chinese. It goes without saying that through the passage of time, Chinese culinary art has developed to great heights.

### **3.2.3 Family**

Many writers of Chinese Culture such as Latourette (1934), Lee (1986) and Lip (1993) to name a few, regard the family as the most basic and characteristic of the Chinese institution. Latourette (1934) is of the view that the family has been more emphasized among the Chinese than among other races as it plays a leading role in economic life, social control, moral

education and government. As such, the family has been included by the researcher as one of the five themes for culture analysis.

### 3.2.3.1 The Family Unit

Lee (1986) stresses the importance of the state and family in dictating how the Chinese should live. Ling (1993) shares a similar view when he points to the fact that Chinese language stresses the importance of the correlation between the family and state. Latourette (1934) states that the family has been regarded as the model for the government and the state is considered as a large family. The term *guo-jia* is in fact a direct transition from the *jia* or family to the *guo* or state and hence to the successive states of human organization. This is seen in the teaching of Confucius:

If you desire to rule the state, first put your house in order, if you desire to put your house in order, first cultivate yourself morally, to cultivate yourself morally, first put your heart right. To put your heart right, one must be sincere. Therefore if your heart is right, your morals are correct, your house will be in order, and only then can you rule the state.

(Lee 1986: 14)

The above precepts have permeated Chinese life through the ages and therefore the family unit has been included as one of the themes of Chinese culture for this study. Furthermore, members of a family are to stand by one another in moments of trial and distress. Consequently, the more prosperous



members of the extended family are expected to take care of their aged and indigent relatives. Latourette (1934) likens the family to the security offered by insurance policies and old age pensions of today.

Tung (1961) in his book "Law and Society in Traditional China" writes about the Chinese family which was patriarchal where the head of the family was the grandfather or father. He could exercise authority over all family members including his wife and concubines, sons and grandsons, his servants and slaves. The concept of ancestor worship which was central to the perpetuation of the family further enhanced the authority of the family head. The authority of the family head was recognized and upheld by the law.

Tung (1961:20) quotes the *Shuo wen*, the earliest Chinese dictionary, to explain the character *fu* or father. It is formed by a hand holding a stick which symbolizes the head's coercive powers. The grandfather or father has the power to punish a disobedient son or grandson and this is done with the approval of society and authorization of the law. Tung (1961:20) quotes the *Lu-shih Ch'un-chiu* which says, "if there is no anger or punishment in the family, the faults of the family will immediately appear." Thus, to rule a family strictly was equated to ruling a nation.

Following the Confucian precept of proper relationship, the family is the basic unit wherein the relationship between individuals, men, women, young and

old is ordered. Lee (1983: 14,15) speaks of the five fundamental human relations which were taught to a Chinese child. The purpose of doing so was to maintain a proper basis for a stable society, and a peaceful and orderly country or world. They are the relationship between:

- i) husband and wife
- ii) father and son
- iii) brothers (brothers and sisters)
- iv) sovereign and subjects
- v) friends

Lee (1983) states that no relationship exists beyond the five mentioned above, except for that between the teacher and pupil which according to Chinese tradition, is similar to that between parent and children.

### **3.2.3.2 Filial Piety**

Smith (1986:171) points out that to enumerate the characteristics of the Chinese without mentioning filial piety is unthinkable. Schafer (1969) attributes reverence for the family and home as an outcome of ancestor worship with filial piety as its corresponding outgrowth. According to Schafer, each father knew that only through training his children to revere him while he is alive could he be assured that his spirit would be honoured

upon his death. This was done because each father recognized that he would one day be an ancestor. Rattenbury (1949) is of the view that filial piety or *hsiao* is the most important of all words in the Chinese language as Confucius declared that it is the beginning of all virtue. Therefore, filial piety has been included as one of the aspects of Chinese culture.

Smith (1986) states that discussion of filial piety is not an easy task as there is no English expression which provides an exact translation. This applies to a great variety of terms in Chinese and an example in point is the term "ceremony" or *li* of which filial piety is closely linked. Smith (1986) cites a passage from M. Callery as quoted in the "Middle Kingdom": "Ceremony epitomizes the entire Chinese mind" and according to Smith, the Book of Rites is *per se* the most exact and complete monograph which China could give of herself to other nations (1986: 171).

Smith (1986) feels that a discussion of 'filial piety' would not be complete without tracing the subject to the Four Books, and to the other classics especially in the "Filial Piety Classic." "The Filial Piety Classic" records the following:

"There are three thousand crimes to which one or the other of the five kinds of punishment is attached as a penalty, and of these no one is greater than disobedience to parents."

(Smith, 1986:172)

According to Smith (1986), Chinese filial piety is many sided and the same things are viewed in all situations or by all observers. He continues that the Chinese are expressly taught that a defect of any virtue has as its origin, a lack of filial piety and can be seen in the following saying:

He who violates propriety is deficient in filial conduct. He who serves his prince but is not loyal lacks filial piety. He who is a magistrate without due respect for its duties is lacking in filial piety. He who does not show proper sincerity towards his friends lacks filial piety. He who fails to exhibit courage in battle lacks filial piety.

(Smith, 1986:173)

Rattenbury (1949) states that filial piety is reflected in Confucius's declaration that *hsiao* was "the beginning of all virtue." Thus, the doctrine of filial conduct seen here embraces more than mere acts and involves the whole moral being. Even exposing oneself to danger is considered an unfilial act. A study by the California department of Public Health (1962-67) suggests that inhibition of exploratory risk-taking is vital in avoidance of accidents among children. Hsu (1971) attributes that such inhibition for the Chinese is rooted in the ethic of filial piety. Ho (1986) suggests that exposing one self to physical danger is considered unfilial as it is in line with the Confucian injunction reported in Ho (1986:26) that "the body with its hair and skin is received from the parents, do not cause it harm."

Ho (1986) reports that the above teaching of Confucius continues to exercise its influence on the Chinese even on American soil. Therefore, Smith (1986),

in his discussion of filial piety concludes that the real basis of filial piety is felt to be gratitude. According to Smith (1986), Confucius stressed the requirement that parents be treated with reverence for without reverence, mere physical care rendered to them can be equated to the care bestowed upon dogs and horses. Rattenbury (1949) concludes that filial piety is an "inevitable virtue" as it means treating elders with due regard and in the same spirit as treating one's brothers and children as well. This in turn will be passed on as in the saying "as you treat your father and he his, so your sons will be likely to treat you" (Rattenbury 1949:145).

### **3.2.3.3 Posterity**

Smith (1986) quotes Mencius ( 372-289 B.C.), with regard to the most important aspect of filial piety:

"There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them."

(Smith:1986:178)

The need for posterity arises as a result of ancestral worship practiced by the Chinese. Thus, it has been made the most important duty in life. It has, therefore, been included as one of the aspects for the theme of family in this study. Rattenbury (1949) explains that all Chinese love children, especially sons, and it is unfilial for a man to be without sons. Sons provide the link to bind the generations through the perpetuation of the family name. In addition,

ancestral worship was performed through the male line. Therefore, Smith (1986) concurs with Rattenbury (1949) and Tung (1961) that perpetuation of the family is bound by ancestral worship. Consequently, a bachelor or a married man without a son is considered unfilial. Hence, a man is allowed to divorce his wife if she fails to have male children. Latourette (1934) observes that a woman without a son is a reproach among her neighbours and to her husband. Consequently, she is often without honour or provision for her old age. Rattenbury (1949) confirms the above by stating that a woman who has not given birth to a son, has no true place in society. Therefore, it has been a practice for all Chinese in China and elsewhere to have many children especially sons. Lee (1986) states that this is acceptable and reasonable as the people in an agricultural land require extra hands to till the ground. On the other hand, Smith (1986) contradicts Lee's opinion by criticizing the practice of concubinage with all its attendant miseries. He states that it furnishes ground for the Chinese to experience the greatest delight at the birth of a son and a corresponding depression at the birth of a daughter. This tenet of the Chinese doctrine which emphasizes on leaving posterity as a filial conduct has led to the adoption of children, regardless of the ability for adequate financial support. This sentiment is expressed in the following saying: "Trees are raised for shade, children are reared for old age." Smith (1986) observes that this has led to early marriages and brought into existence millions of human beings living in poverty.

To conclude, perpetuation of posterity is regarded as an act of filial piety as

it is a result of ancestral worship practised by the traditional Chinese. This practice has been encouraged by some for the purpose of increasing man power while it has been criticized by others for its partiality towards male children and the existence of millions of humans living in poverty.

#### **3.2.3.4 Reverence for Elders**

Another aspect of the Chinese family is the practice of reverence for the elderly. This has been a Chinese tradition recognized by all Chinese till today. Since Confucian philosophy and teaching is based on reverence, Ross (1990) states that Confucian philosophy of reverence aims to build character and attainment of real culture as contrasted to knowledge which is just a mere accumulation of facts. Therefore, it has been included as an aspect for the theme of family in the modified version of Nostrand Emergent model for culture analysis.

Ingram and Ng (1995) state that the elderly are given high status and respect in the family. The oldest member of the family is the ruler of the family. He is respected and obeyed by all. This is applicable in both the rich and poor families.

Tung (1961) states that traditionally, a Chinese son cannot insist on his own will and a properly filial son will accept punishment willingly. He is instructed to refrain from anger and resentment but be more reverential and filial. The

modern Chinese today is still taught from young never to disagree with the elderly, even if they were wrong. Thus, having been raised in this atmosphere, disrespect for elders is unthinkable. Ingram and Ng (1995) observe that even if people did not love their elders, they would never display their feeling as outwardly they would only reveal love and respect to them.

According to Lee (1986), tradition dictates that from the age of sixty, a person acquires status and dignity which is witnessed by the staff he carries in the village. The staff to the Chinese is symbolic of dignity and reverence for old age. When a person is seventy, he is allowed to carry a staff in the country. Lee continues that as a sign of reverence for the aged, a person of seventy should not suffer corporal punishment and an octogenarian should not be scolded. An octogenarian is allowed to carry a staff before the throne and need not kneel before the emperor. People who have reached the age of ninety are regarded by all emperors as being fit to be their advisers.

Ingram and Ng (1995), however, are of the opinion that the way modern Chinese show their respect to their elders have changed. Today, most Chinese can voice their opposition and disagreement to their elders but it is usually done by explaining politely their reasons for opposition. Children of today are taught to respect their grandparents. They are told that grandparents are older therefore their thinking are different. If they have any conflicts with their grandparents, they are to treat them with respect and provide reasons for their disagreement.



### 3.2.4 Education and Knowledge

The importance placed on education and knowledge can be observed in the early division of early Chinese society. According to Lee (1986:19), the four classes of Chinese society were as follows:

- i) Scholars
- ii) Farmers
- iii) Artisans
- iv) Merchants

The above classification was based on priority and importance to the country. Lee (1986) states that scholars occupied top position because they form the ruling class for the simple reason that "the brains are better than the hands." Hence, education was highly prized by the ancient Chinese. Winfield (1950) is of the opinion that no country can compare with China for its reverence for learning. Since the Confucian era, the Chinese are encouraged to seek knowledge as steadfastly as searching for gold. As the saying goes "*Shi nian chuang xia wu ren wen, yi zhao cheng ming tian xia zhi*" [No one spoke to him during the ten years he studied by the window. But the moment he achieved success in the imperial examination, he became well known in the whole world]. Ross (1990) refers to the Confucian teaching which states that good conduct is the outcome of knowledge while evil conduct is a result of ignorance. Knowledge is one with wisdom, and is the fruit of study and

learning. Ignorance is regarded as the mother of all evil, and therefore the duty of education is to teach each man his ignorance.

Lee (1986:70) quotes the "*Maxim of Home management*" to demonstrate the traditional love of Chinese for education: The classics must be taught though the descendants may be stupid. Even in Malaysia, when Chinese immigrants came in the early 20's, they started their own schools. Chinese leaders such as Yap Ah Loy, Cheng Soo Leng and Phua Hoon Hiong started Chinese Schools in the Straits Settlements and the Malay Federated States.

Lip (1993) stated that some early leaders of clan associations were at a disadvantage because of their illiteracy, hence they promoted education. Schools were set up for the education of children of clan members. Lip continues that till today education is highly prized by the Chinese and the above function still exists in some Chinese clan associations where scholarships and bursary schemes for needy students are made available.

### **3.2.5 Chinese Etiquette**

Lip (1993) states that Chinese protocol and etiquette were extremely elaborate in ancient times. Codes of behaviour and practice were written to ensure that court officials and every rank and people from all walks of life behave in a civilized manner. Codes of behaviour and practice were also

written in the old classics. According to Lip (1993), a woman was supposed to practise the *san cong* or three obediences namely:

- i) obedience to the father before marriage
- ii) obedience to the husband after marriage
- iii) obedience to the son in old age

Virtues such as diligence, kindness and protocol of the Qin period was advocated by Confucius.

Chinese characteristics such as face, humility and politeness will be briefly discussed as aspects of Chinese Etiquette in the following sections.

### **3.2.5.1 Face**

Lip (1993) states that the attitude of a man towards his fellow men should be based on *ren* (magnanimity) and *yi* (trust and honour). The word *ren* (magnanimity) is formed with two Chinese characters which reflects the importance of interdependence. Hence, the Chinese believe that a man needs to be humble and give in to those who ask for favours. This is to avoid hurting the feeling of those who ask for favours and be regarded as not giving them "face" or "tearing their face." Therefore, Young (1994) affirms that face is social capital and it is deeply embedded into the core of the Chinese person's identity and integrity. Since face is deeply entwined with other's,

face is regarded as collective property by King and Bond (1985). Young states that Chinese elders admonishment of "Don't lose face for us" exemplifies the above thinking.

Lip (1993) concurs with Lee (1986) that "face" is an aspect of great importance to the Chinese. Since the face is regarded as one of the most important parts of the body, it is metaphorically equated to the pride and honor of a person. Lee (1986) stresses that face has a deeper and more profound connotation than the "honor" prized by the west. Chinese from all strata of society have a "face" to protect and to hurt a person's pride is to cause him to lose face which is considered unthinkable.

Smith (1986) observes that to offer a person a handsome present is to "give him/her face." Conversely, a gift from an individual should not be totally rejected but instead be accepted in part only. Smith provides examples for keeping face: "To be accused of a fault is to "lose face" and in the face of whatever evidence provided, the fault must be denied in order to save "face." A further example is the case where a man has a debt to collect which he knows that he shall never collect. In going to the debtor, he raises a terrible disturbance, by which means he shows that he knows what ought to be done in the presence of all. Although he does not get his money he has saved his "face" and has thus secured himself from imposition in the future.

In social interaction, there are certain things which Lee (1983) classifies as

"social typhoons" (quarrels). Though it may appear unimportant, a quarrel is very much culture related. Lee points out that it can be observed in the use of high language and low words which seldom refer to the actual faults of the parties involved, "but impute the most ignoble origin on the person by heaping filth upon his female ancestors." To call a person a liar is not effective as everybody is not free from lying. Consequently, there is no harm in being branded as a liar. However, "heaping filth on his ancestors" and insinuating about their ignoble origins hurts most as he loses "face."

The concern of the Chinese with maintaining face is matched equally with the concern for giving and leaving honour to another's face. Young (1994) agrees with Vernon (1982) that face-saving strategies occupy important features in Chinese ritual expression. Rattenbury (1949) notes that the Chinese love their "face" and a man whose face cannot be taken away is considered either a saint or a shameless reprobate. Consequently, Vernon (1982:12) states that the Chinese "are more concern about shame (being seen to be wrong) than about guilt (feeling that one is wrong)." The reason, as attested by Rattenbury (1949), is that it is only through shame that one attains proper pride and by avoiding shame, one learns self-respect. Therefore, Rattenbury concludes that it is a fatal mistake for anyone to live in China and not understand her pride.

### **3.2.5.2 Humility**

Another important characteristic of Chinese behaviour is humility. Ross (1990) quotes Confucius's definition of the noble man to heighten this characteristic:

The noble man is affable but no flatterer. . . He is dignified without pride. He is easy to serve, but difficult to please. . . He conceals his virtues. . . He meditates on virtue.

(Ross, 1990:109)

Confucius views the noble man to be sincere, humble and virtuous. True greatness can only be gotten from humility and according to Lee (1983) this is reflected in the Chinese language both in the oral and written form. Ling (1995) concurs with Lee (1983) that this etiquette which stresses on the importance of humility is seen in the practice of children calling all their peers "elder brother" and those of the same age as their father "uncle." Haughtiness and arrogance is viewed by the Chinese to be most offensive and it indicates a lack of breeding on the part of the transgressor.

### **3.2.5.3 Politeness**

Lee (1983), states that politeness is the basis of all social intercourse as it is reflected in conversations and actions. Lee believes that it is in the blood of the Chinese to be polite. To support this, he points to the fact that there are

300 rules of ceremony and 3,000 rules of behaviour in the Chinese code of conduct. Young (1994) states that in much of China's recorded history, social proprieties and familial obligation ranked high. The Chinese have, therefore, referred to China as the "the land of ritual and right behaviour" as this is reflected in the 10,000 volumes of the Qing encyclopaedia which is focussed on aspects of "li" or known variously as "rites", "propriety", "decorum", or "manners." Another example of politeness is in the use of honorifics in conversation among Chinese. When two strangers who are Chinese meet, one will ask the other, "What is your honorable name?" (gui sing) and the other will reply saying, "My humble surname is . . ." (pi sing).

Smith (1986) is of the opinion that even the most bigoted critic of the Chinese has to admit that the Chinese have brought the practice of politeness to a level of perfection which is unknown of in the West as it is almost unimaginable. Young (1994) provides an example of Chinese politeness and face-saving strategy in a rejection letter to a British author from a Republic of China journal:

We have read your manuscript with boundless delight. If we were to publish your paper it would be impossible for us to publish any work of a lower standard. And it is unthinkable that, in the next thousand of years we shall see its equal, we are, to our regret, compelled to return your divine composition, and beg you a thousand times to overlook our short sight and timidity.

(Young, 1994:6)

Chinese politeness and face-saving strategy go hand in hand to ensure that the hearer is not humiliated when a rejection is impossible to avoid. To avoid using honorifics when conversing with strangers is considered unrefined. Lee (1986) states that the main principle in the use of honorifics is to exalt the position of the one spoken to and to be humble in reply. Smith (1986) observes that the entire practice of the use of honorific terms help to keep in view relations of graduated superiority which have been regarded as essential for the conservation of society. Smith stated that they have been viewed as lubricating fluids to smooth human intercourse.

Young (1994) notes that scrupulous care was taken in traditional China to modify direct address such as "I" and "you" which is substituted with reference to a third person such as "humble person" to refer to oneself. Young refers to Holcome's (1895) description of an encounter where the speaker customarily raises the addressee and correspondingly lowers him/herself in polite discourse. It is seen in the following exchange:

What is your honorable cognomen?  
The trifling name of your little brother is Wang.  
What is your exalted longevity?  
Very small. Only a miserable seventy years.  
Where is your noble mansion?  
The mud hovel in which I hide is in such or such a place.  
How many precious parcels (sons) have you?  
Only so many stupid little pigs.

(Young 1994:7)



The Chinese idea of polite discourse is shown from the above exchange through the use of words such as "trifling" to refer to the speaker's family name, "small" and "miserable" to refer to his advanced years, "mud hovel" to refer to his home and the words "stupid little pigs" was used to refer to the speaker's sons in order to indicate his humble status.

### **3.3 Summary**

Five themes have been selected to represent an overview of Chinese culture. The themes are love and marriage, food, family, education and knowledge as well as Chinese Etiquette. Although love and marriage is a universal theme in the celebration of living, it is important for the Chinese because of ancestral worship and it serves to perpetuate the family line. Food, on the other hand, has been regarded as the most important item in a man's life and has been developed by the Chinese to a great culinary art. The family is considered a basic unit for the organization of the state and country. To the Chinese, if one's house is in order, then one can rule the state. Education and knowledge has been highly prized by the Chinese as the work of education is to guide the entire life and to mold a person to be a useful member of society. While Chinese etiquette which include codes of behaviour and practice were written to ensure that people of every rank and file would behave in a civilized manner.