

Face, Harmony, and Social Structure

*An Analysis of Organizational Behavior
across Cultures*

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concerning regulatory mechanisms underlying tarnished images or the potential connection of images related to interdependent groups of employees.

A final area that I address is that of embarrassment. Research in this area has been conducted by Edelman and his colleagues (Edelman, 1990; Edelman & Hampson, 1979) as well as Schlenkar (1980, 1982). Edelman classifies face-saving techniques into five general categories: apologies, accounts (e.g., excuses), avoidance (e.g., escape), humor (e.g., laughter), and aggression. In a review of international studies concerning embarrassment, Edelman found that the majority of his respondents reported using a “no verbal response” way of dealing with embarrassment. (However, this study presents a difficulty inasmuch as the majority of the respondents did not specify any response whatsoever, which suggests that there may have been some reporting error biasing the results of the survey.) Although this study suggests that the styles used by people for verbally dealing with embarrassment do not vary substantially across countries, more research is clearly needed on this topic.

Toward a Conceptualization of Face

So what, then, constitutes face? As I stated earlier in this chapter, my use of face consists of two general parts. First, there is a distinction between face tied to rules of conduct versus face as a position in a social hierarchy. Second, there is a distinction between the source of these perceptions, namely, internal versus external reference. In addition, there is a distinction among qualitatively different forms of face.

I present a two-way categorization of face in Figure 3-1, and I provide some examples in Table 3-1. According to this typology, two dimensions and two referent

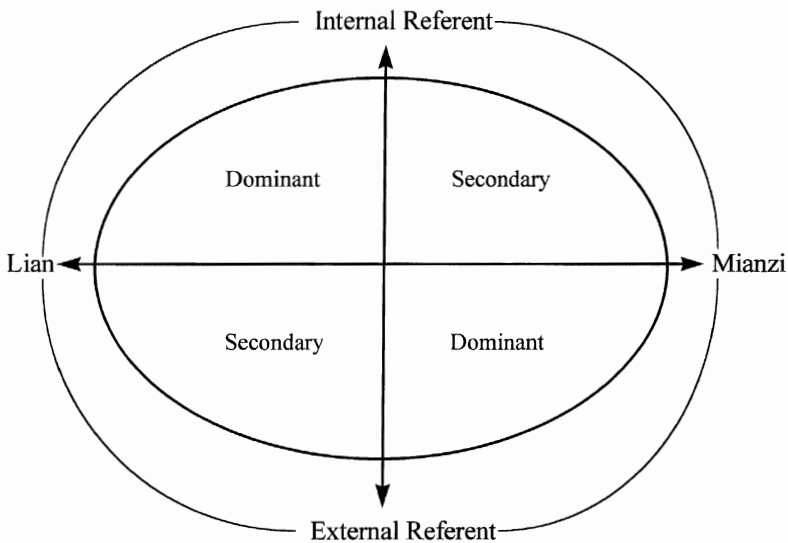


Figure 3-1. An Overview of Face

Table 3-1. Taxonomy and Examples of Face in Organizations

| Source of Face | Lian | Mianzi |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Internally enacted | Self-evaluation based on adherence to moral standard of behavior internally referenced. Example: feeling of personal guilt because of a failure such as inability to achieve a self-set work goal. | Personal view of one's accomplishments. Example: personal status for working at a major research university. |
| Externally enacted | Social evaluation of the morality/goodness of a person's actions. Example: recognition of a person's integrity and honor for engaging in extra-role work behavior. | Social recognition of a person's position vis-à-vis other social actors. Example: recognition of a person's position in a company based on office location, expense account, parking space, et cetera. |

sources of face can be combined to form four general groups of face characteristics. The first dimension involves the type of face under discussion, namely, lian versus mianzi. (In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss each of these forms of face in further detail.) The basic logic of this distinction stems from the linguistic guidance provided by Hu (1944), among others, but my use of these constructs differs from the existing literature. Whereas the existing discussions of lian and mianzi treat the constructs as either an internal/external judgment of self (e.g., Hu, 1944) or overlapping versions of self as derived from a social interaction (e.g., Ho, 1994), I define lian as a set of rules for moral conduct and mianzi as a person's position within a social structure. In this general sense, lian reflects the enactment of "correct" behavior (and values/beliefs/norms underlying those behaviors), whereas mianzi reflects an outcome state of social interaction.

Briefly, lian is a person's adherence to moral or evaluative rules of conduct based on universal, societal, organization, and community standards for accepted behavior. Lian reflects a legitimization of an individual within a given society. A person lacking regard for lian is viewed as a sociopath or outsider. For example, killing is a universal violation of ethical principles, with the only systematic exceptions due to events such as wars or classifications of "other groups" as nonhuman (e.g., Nazi German views of Jews). (Even in these extreme cases, such actions are often deemed as unethical and immoral by external referents or even the cultures themselves after the fact.) In an organizational context, lian refers to the adherence and maintenance of work norms and principles that are endorsed by an organization as desirable, such as voluntarily working late, helping new employees with their work, et cetera. The general topic of organizational citizenship behavior pioneered by Organ and his colleagues (e.g., Organ, 1987) and addressed more recently by Farh, Dobbins, and Cheng (1991) and Farh, Earley, and Lin (in press) from a cross-cultural perspective suggests that several etic dimensions of citizenship behavior are engaged in by employees. For instance, conscientiousness (e.g., discretionary behaviors on the part of an employee that go well beyond the minimum role requirements of the organization in the areas of attendance, obeying rules and regulations, taking breaks, working hard, and so forth) and altruism (e.g., discretionary behavior that has the effect of helping others

around him or her [mostly peers, clients, supervisors] with an organizationally relevant task or problem) are etically endorsed aspects of work performance that reflect a person's lian or adherence to moral conduct.

Mianzi is a characteristic of a person that reflects his or her standing in a social hierarchy, such as position, status, role, et cetera. A CEO of a large multinational corporation (MNC) has much mianzi, whereas an administrative clerk has relatively little. Likewise, an employee who is relied on by others as the "local expert" for computer networking information has mianzi attributable to his or her knowledge. Power and mianzi, however, should not be confused. Whereas power is the capacity to influence the actions of others (Pfeffer, 1992), mianzi involves the evaluations of a person's position in a hierarchy relative to others. Is it possible to have mianzi but not power? It might be argued that this is the dilemma faced in Britain with the monarchy. Prince Charles has mianzi (although recent scandals might challenge this assertion) as a monarch, but he has little formal authority and power. Such assertions have been made about the U.S. vice presidency as well, namely, that it is a status position having little real power. These are, however, exceptions, and people who have a great deal of mianzi typically have social power. Mianzi is derived from a number of different characteristics, as I will describe in Chapter 4.

The second dimension concerning face involves the locus from which it is derived. Face is derived from both internal and external (to the person) sources. That is to say, face reflects an interaction of self and others' perceptions and attributions. There are at least two useful ways to address the nature of person perception as it relates to face. First, the content of person perception can be discussed from a cross-cultural viewpoint. What characteristic(s) appear to be used by people as a basis for their personal and other social perceptions? Just as some researchers have sought to define the general nature of values and beliefs that underlie societal culture (e.g., Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961), others have focused on the constituent elements of person schema and perception (e.g., Bond & Forgas, 1984). Second, the source of these perceptions constitutes an additional element of social perception of face. I employ a basic dichotomy in characterizing the referent source, namely, internal versus external sources. However, it is useful to further delineate the external category into additional subcategories.

The linkage of a person's social context and culture to person perception is not well understood by scholars (Bond & Forgas, 1984; Smith & Bond, 1996). The importance of this connection to face is that it represents the link of context to face inasmuch as face reflects self and other perceptions. Although the research on person perception is at a developmental stage in the literature from a content perspective (Bond, 1996, personal communication), a potential connection can be made through an examination of the personality traits underlying person perception. In other words, if we understand the mapping of fundamental personality traits onto judgments concerning face, it becomes possible to understand the potential relationship of cultural context on face as well. In one of the first studies of its type, Bond and Forgas (1984) examined the nature of personality traits (the so-called "Big Five" traits, namely, introversion/extroversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness, identified by McCrae and Costa [1987]) in understanding social perception for samples of Australians and Hong Kong Chinese. They found that the general structure of these traits held up across the cultural boundaries but that there was

reciprocate in an exchange (e.g., giving money in return for love), repayment requires a disproportionate return, and the exchange may still be viewed as unsatisfactory for the parties. This suggests that the natural balance point, or harmony, will reflect norms of reciprocity and similarity. By norms of reciprocity, I mean that in some cultures an exchange is expected to be two-way, but in others such an outcome violates expectations (i.e., it insults the giver). By norms of similarity, I mean that some resources may be interchangeable in certain cultures but not in others (e.g., Foa encountered difficulty in handling the resource of information). Thus the nature of harmony within an interacting group depends on the type of relationship employed in a given culture. It is this type of relationship, or social tie, that I now describe in relation to face and harmony.

Social Ties and Harmony

The various exchange and equilibrium models discussed to this point share the general position that exchange processes are based on universal and consistent patterns. Even in the Foa and Foa work, with its origins in social exchange across cultures, there is an implicit assumption that exchange is based on a consistent principle of equity across cultures even though the specific resources to be exchanged vary. I now turn to a discussion of an exchange framework that provides an opportunity for linking societal and organizational levels to individual ones.

A recent model proposed by Fiske in his book, *Structures of Social Life* (1991), examines an interesting perspective on exchange in social interaction. Fiske argues that four basic forms of social behavior are the universal aspects of social exchange. The first form, *communal sharing*, is the behavior observed in a family context. Resources in such a circumstance are shared according to need, and people monitor their own consumption of community resources. The second form, *authority ranking*, involves resource allocations based on status differentials. For example, in traditional Chinese society the eldest son gains control over the family's resources after the death of his father. In nearly all organizations the CEO receives more attention and respect than a shop-floor employee. The third form, *equality matching*, is the distribution of resources based on an equality principle. In other words, each person (by virtue of his or her humanity) is equally deserving of a comparable share of resources in a community. This form of exchange emphasizes reciprocity and fairness and is characteristic of Western Systems of justice. Finally, the fourth form, *market pricing*, involves an equity-based distribution of resources using general market principles. In this case, if someone works twice as long as others in a company, he or she should receive twice as much as others receive in terms of reward.

According to Fiske, social behavior is based on these four universal resource exchange principles, but the specific form generally endorsed varies within and across societies. As a result, a common institution such as marriage occurs as an etic, but its underlying impetus may differ. For example, in certain cultures people may marry for love (i.e., communal sharing), but in other cultures they may marry for position and status (i.e., authority ranking) (Triandis & Bhawuk, in press). An important aspect of Fiske's argument is that all four principles exist within each society, but they vary in relative magnitude of importance, as well as specific manifestation. So market

pricing may be very important in the United States but less so in Sweden. Further, it may manifest itself in the United States as individual achievement over others in a business context (e.g., the corporate "rat race") but in Sweden as a social achievement (e.g., individual achievement in an environmental cause). However, it is present in both countries. (A difficulty with Fiske's argument is that although he endorses a fragmented view of culture [Geertz, 1973; Martin, 1992], he argues that motivated action can be viewed as a general property of a given culture [1991:386–389]. This suggests that these resource allocation principles are motivated at a cultural level but not well represented as shared meaning systems—an apparent internal contradiction of his model as he crosses from an individual to a macro level of analysis.) A useful aspect of Fiske's analysis and model is that these four exchange principles are acting in a quasi-independent fashion within any given culture. This suggests that social relationships may be governed by principles that are, at times, complementary, independent, or even conflicting. In terms of an equilibrium perspective, Fiske suggests that social equilibriums are tenuous and fluid because of the complexity of interaction among the four resource principles.

I adopt the four forms of social exchange described by Fiske. In Figure 7-1, I present the four exchange forms in relation to two general cultural dimensions—individualism and power distance—along with their hypothesized relation to *lian* and *mianzi*. Although I present just two cultural dimensions in this figure, I discuss a main effects approach to each cultural dimension later in the chapter, and the logic of my analysis for Figure 7-1 can be applied to other clusters of cultural dimensions. Before I discuss the specifics of the figure, some clarification of my nomenclature is

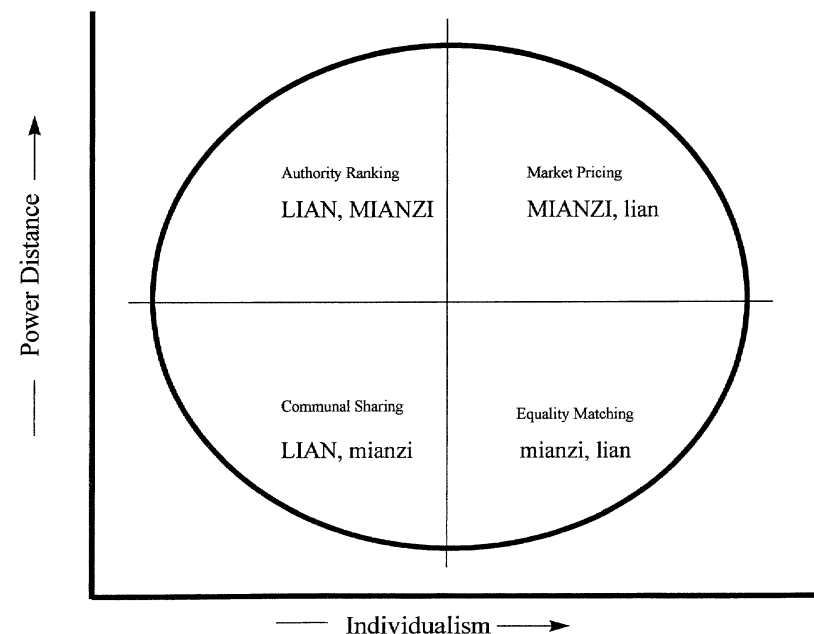


Figure 7-1. Cultural Values and Social Exchange Principles

in order. Specifically, I adopt two conventions in representing the relative strength of *lian* and *mianzi* in a given quadrant. First, face represented by uppercase letters denotes relative importance in a given society. For instance, in the upper right quadrant, *mianzi* is represented as "MIANZI," meaning that it is salient in this quadrant, and *lian* is represented as "lian," meaning that it is relatively less salient. Second, the types of face are presented in relative order of importance. For instance, in the lower right quadrant, *mianzi* is listed before *lian*, suggesting its relative importance. Note, however, that in this quadrant both constructs are represented by lowercase letters, suggesting that they are relatively less salient than for a society in the upper left quadrant. Although I propose relative differences in salience, this does not suggest that face exists in a given quadrant. Additionally, a society with *lian* in uppercase letters versus one with *lian* in lowercase letters does not imply that the former is higher in moral character than the latter. It simply suggests that *lian* is relatively more salient to people within that culture.

The significance of these forms of social ties/interdependencies to face lies in the nature of how face is maintained, gained, or lost. In the final section of this chapter I briefly discuss these relationships as a function of the five cultural dimensions described in Chapter 8. Before I discuss these dimensions in relation to harmony, several caveats are in order. First, I would concur with scholars such as Geertz (1973) and Fiske (1991) who suggest that there are multiple, and sometimes conflicting, exchange patterns within any given culture. Although I present and discuss the role of social exchange and cultural values to face in "pure" forms, these representations are necessarily oversimplified. In every culture, we can expect to find all forms of social exchange. However, I agree with Fiske's point that there are dominant forms that are characteristic of specific cultures, and it is the dominant pattern that I have attempted to represent in my discussion. Second, the specific content of these exchanges and relationships varies as a function of cultural context. Thus, in the United States having an expensive imported automobile may represent *mianzi* as a general category (e.g., a tribute to personal status), but in Hong Kong owning such a vehicle may represent a different manifestation of *mianzi* (e.g., a tribute to the success of one's family or company).

Before I point to the specific and dominant trends within each form of cultural context, some general discussion of social exchange and forms of face is in order. *Mianzi* can be traded or exchanged in a manner analogous to a physical product in a variety of interdependence structures. Although *mianzi* can be exchanged in any of the four models, it is most heavily emphasized in an authority-ranking or market-pricing context because it can provide individuals with desired material or status gains. For example, a person might ingratiate him- or herself by complimenting the boss on his or her golf game in order to gain a promotion or a raise. While a market-pricing exchange is characterized by a strong norm of reciprocity and equity (Ikeh, 1974; Hwang, 1987), communal and equality matching arrangements are characterized by an increasing emphasis on the relationship itself as an important outcome. In these exchanges, *mianzi* may be exchanged as a means of further strengthening the relationship for future interactions rather than simply obtaining an immediate outcome or reward. As Gillmore (1983) points out, an immediacy of exchange characterizes a restricted form that tends to foster a market-pricing relationship. For instance, a subordinate might ingratiate him- or herself to facilitate a relationship with

his or her boss as well as to obtain a raise. In this circumstance, a good relationship (i.e., friendship) becomes an important outcome. Thus a subordinate may give *mianzi* to his or her superior in order to foster a stronger social relationship with the superior.

Lian is most likely the relevant domain of authority ranking and communal exchanges. Why is this? In brief, in exchanges among strangers the only rules that need to be endorsed are those that impact and regulate exchange. Questions of moral character are minimized through an emphasis and dependence on rules of exchange (e.g., equity or reciprocity), and the market becomes a surrogate for moral character (Fiske, 1991; Homans, 1961; Williamson, 1975; Wilson, 1993). In such a case, the rules of exchange are the defining characteristics of social goodness, and *lian* becomes less critical to successful exchange (except for those instances in which people who do not have *lian* are not trusted to follow the market rules). However, given the relative stability of authority-ranking and communal exchanges, the question of *lian* becomes of tantamount importance. There are at least two reasons for this. First, people in these exchanges are concerned with maintaining and promoting this relationship as an end rather than for personal gain. For instance, Hwang (1987) describes three characteristics that integrate a typical Chinese family into a cohesive financial unit: (1) every member gives his or her personal income over to the family; (2) the family is responsible for every member's daily expenses; and (3) the family's surplus is shared equally. Thus the need to regulate financial exchanges in authority ranking in order to secure personal gain is inapplicable. Second, individuals in authority-ranking and communal exchanges are highly concerned with the moral character of their compatriots because a violation of moral principles threatens the existence and stability of the collective. While market forces may govern a market-pricing arrangement, an authority-ranking and communal form is regulated through personal integrity and devotion to the good of the relationship. The success of the family depends on maintenance of the relationship itself.

It is important to note, however, that face is not inevitably tied to a given type of exchange practice. That is to say, a communal exchange is not always characteristic of an emphasis on *lian*, nor is a market-pricing exchange always characteristic of an emphasis on *mianzi*. As I will discuss in the next section of the chapter, there are instances in which a dominant form of social tie is associated with a secondary form of face.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the importance of social exchange practices in my face theory is that they provide a critical linkage of societal and organizational context to individual behavior and face. In other words, people's cultures shape the nature of social exchange practices, and these practices guide the form(s) of face valued in a given society. Thus a person from a high power distance and collective culture endorses a general form of social exchange based on an authority-ranking model. In this context, it is important that people maintain the rules needed for sustaining the viability of their collective (*lian*) as well as reinforcing the relative statuses of members within the collective (*mianzi*). Group welfare requires an important balance of trust and endorsement of group structure through *lian* along with a concomitant exchange of *mianzi* to reinforce relative position within the collective.

This general logic can be applied to the remaining three forms of exchange. Fiske (1991) describes communal sharing as

a relationship of equivalence in which people are merged (for the purposes at hand) so that the boundaries of individual selves are indistinct. It is characterized by the fact that people attend to group membership and have a sense of common identity, while the individuality of separate persons is not marked. Members of the group are undifferentiated with respect to the dimensions to which people are attending. . . . People have a sense of solidarity, unity, and belonging, and identify with the collectivity: they think of themselves as being all the same in some significant respect, not as individuals but as “we.” (13)

While I agree with the general sentiment of Fiske’s notion, a communal exchange does not necessarily presume that people in a relationship develop a “we” mentality (e.g., as in Triandis’s concept of the horizontal individualist found in Sweden or Australia). A person from an individualistic culture such as the United States is perfectly capable of forming quasi-communal relationships while maintaining a strong sense of the individual. The heavy emphasis in American management on empowerment programs, teamwork, participation, et cetera, points to communal-like work relationships. In terms of the market-pricing form, individuals “interact with others when they decide that it is rational to do so in terms of these [market] values.” This type of exchange is best characterized as operating through a heavy emphasis on *lian* and less emphasis on *mianzi*. After all, the emphasis in this quadrant is on a communal/collective arrangement in which members share power equally. As a result, there is little interest in acquiring *mianzi* since it inevitably enables in-group members to differentiate among themselves. The Israeli *kibbutz* represents an extreme in these terms inasmuch as new members devote their possessions and wealth to the *kibbutz* and personal ownership of goods is minimized (Erez & Earley, 1993). Further, differential role statuses are minimized in *kibbutzim* although some differentials occur (Tannenbaum et al., 1974). *Lian* is a critical factor in this context because the security of a collective depends on its group members’ adherence to rules for group survival. Social dynamics including loafing, free riding, and exploitation are avoided through the endorsement of moral rules of conduct (Earley, 1989).

In a market-pricing relationship “people denominate value in a single universal metric, typically price (or “utility”), by which they can compare any two persons or associated commodities, qualitatively alike or unlike” (Fiske, 1991:15). In a market relationship, individuals seek to influence others through various means, and although some trust and mutual support exist, individuals do not view the relationship itself as an end. People share common characteristics (e.g., coming from the same town or region) and some common goals, but each person views him- or herself as the central point of an interaction. While an authority-ranking exchange is relatively stable and long-lived, a market-pricing exchange can be quite short-lived, such as the single exchange between a shopkeeper and an out-of-town visitor in need of supplies. However, market arrangements need not be terribly short-lived; as long as interacting parties find their exchanges to be mutually satisfactory, market-pricing relationships can be quite long-term. (At first glance, someone might suggest that if market pricing becomes long-term, it is likely to become an authority-ranking or communal form. In other words, as people interact over time, they come to trust one another and form an implicit in-group. However, this need not be the case because a single defection by one party [“unjust” action] will disrupt the relationship.) In a market-pricing model, *mianzi* is very important and serves as the foundation of the relationship.

People enter into transactions in order to gain relative advantage over one another as they exchange resources. *Lian* is important inasmuch as people adhere to basic rules of exchange, but these rules can be quite simple and straightforward.

Finally, an equality-matching form of social exchange represents an exchange in-kind. Each person (by virtue of his or her humanity) deserves a comparable share of resources to other members of a community, but members do not necessarily form long-term bonds or ties. In this form of exchange, there is an emphasis on reciprocity and fairness that is characteristic of Western systems of justice. In this form of exchange, resources of a similar type are exchanged and primarily for symbolic rather than utilitarian purposes. In such a setting, *lian* and *mianzi* are relatively less important because exchanges occur for ritualistic purposes.

These exchanges become increasingly important as a cultural context is imposed on the model of face. In the next chapter, I discuss in detail a number of cultural orientations that influence the display and maintenance of face through the types of ties that emerge in these cultures. For the remainder of this section, I describe such exchanges from a more general perspective.

Individualism-Collectivism

In Figure 7-1, the dominant forms of exchange found in an individualistic culture are market pricing and equality matching, whereas the dominant forms of a collectivistic culture are authority ranking and communal sharing. The reason for this polarization is that the strong focus on individual freedom and achievement stressed in an individualistic culture is best demonstrated in market forms of relationships. In these relationships, people are able to maximize their personal gains through effort and work and enhance their *mianzi*. For collectivists, the relationship is an important outcome because people identify with their in-group and do not see themselves as autonomous actors. Thus *lian* becomes critical given the high degree of trust that is placed in one another (e.g., given that gifts cannot be immediately reciprocated, it is essential that in-group members trust that all will contribute fairly to group success and to meeting group responsibilities).

Power Distance

The dominant form of relationship in a high power distance culture is that of authority ranking and market pricing relying on *mianzi* and, to a lesser extent, *lian*. In this form of exchange, a social hierarchy is maintained to the extent that participants acknowledge and reinforce status differentials among members. For instance, in an organization in a high power distance culture, a CEO’s position is reinforced by his or her large office, fancy car, private secretary, company jet, et cetera. These physical manifestations of *mianzi* emphasize to all members of the company that the CEO is powerful and in charge. Additionally, there is likely to be an important contribution of *lian* in a high power distance culture inasmuch as charismatic leaders must show significant personal integrity in order to be effective (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Erez & Earley, 1993). In contrast, an organization in a low power distance culture emphasizes equality and social memberships over personal gain and differentiation. Given that status and material differentials are less significant in this type of society,