

# Less is More? Exploring Cultural Implicature in Emotive Communication: A Case Study of 'Xihuan' in Chinese Literature

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## Abstract

This study investigates the emotive communication patterns associated with the term "xihuan" (like) in Mandarin Chinese and evaluates the applicability of Grice's maxims within the context of Chinese culture. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research draws data from contemporary Chinese literature and utilizes both qualitative content analysis and pragmatic analysis to examine how "xihuan" is pragmatically employed to express affection. The findings reveal a cultural preference among Chinese speakers for restrained emotional expression, influenced by an interdependent self-construal and a cultural emphasis on face preservation. Furthermore, the study identifies instances where speakers intentionally flout Grice's maxims, thereby infusing their communication with emotional significance. These subtle violations are enacted and perceived in contextually and culturally specific ways, enabling the transmission of emotive cues. To elucidate these nuances, the concept of cultural implicature is introduced, demonstrating how speakers convey profound emotional meaning through understated expressions that align with cultural norms favoring subtlety over overt emotional displays. In conclusion, this research enhances the understanding of emotive communication in Mandarin Chinese by highlighting the interaction between cultural norms and pragmatic mechanisms. It contributes to the fields of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies by emphasizing the role of cultural factors in shaping language use and emotional expression.

**Keywords:** Grice, Cooperative Principles, emotive communication, cultural implicature, language and affect, Chinese

## 1. Introduction

Research on the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through foreign language education has provided substantial insights into how language learners engage with and adapt to diverse cultural contexts (Byram 1997; Dewaele 2011). Such research highlights the multifaceted nature of ICC, which encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate and mediate cultural differences effectively. However, a critical yet underexplored aspect of ICC is the role of emotions, despite the established understanding that emotions play a pivotal role in mediating cognitive processes and shaping communicative behaviors (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014).

Negative emotions, such as anxiety and fear, often remain unaddressed in ICC studies, leading to reinforced stereotypes and hindering meaningful intercultural engagement (Horwitz 2001). In contrast, when emotions are recognized and skillfully expressed, they can serve as catalysts for deeper cultural understanding and the dynamic development of intercultural competence (Matsumoto et al. 2007). This dual potential of emotions - as both barriers and enablers of intercultural interaction-signals the need for further exploration of their role within ICC, particularly in relation to how emotions are negotiated and conveyed across different languages and cultural settings.

While previous studies have demonstrated that expressing emotions in a foreign language can sometimes lead to a sense of alienation from one's true self (Pavlenko 2005), other findings suggest that using a foreign language for emotional expression can also provide a liberating experience, offering speakers greater freedom in articulating their feelings (Pavlenko 2006). However, research in this area remains incomplete, especially with regard to the emotional dimensions of ICC within the context of Mandarin Chinese. The current literature often treats emotional expression in general terms, without delving into the nuanced pragmatic mechanisms that govern how emotions are communicated and interpreted in different languages (Dewaele 2018). This oversight highlights a significant gap, which this study seeks to address by focusing on how pragmatic factors shape emotive communication in

Mandarin Chinese, particularly within culturally specific contexts.

In this regard, emotive communication within romantic relationships is a particularly relevant domain, as it involves complex cultural and linguistic dynamics (Belli 2010; Owen 1987). The process of building romantic connections through emotional exchanges, including nonverbal cues, is not fully captured by existing frameworks in interpersonal pragmatics (Burgoon et al. 2021). This underscores the need for a more integrated approach that combines pragmatic and intercultural perspectives to better understand the role of emotions in communication across different cultural systems (Kecskes 2014). Addressing this theoretical gap, the present study investigates the pragmatic mechanisms underlying emotive communication in Mandarin Chinese, with a particular focus on the expression of affection and related emotions.

Specifically, this study examines the use of the term "xihuan" (like) in expressing affection within the Chinese cultural context. By doing so, it seeks to explore how emotive communication is pragmatically structured in Mandarin and to test the universality of Grice's maxims, investigating their applicability to emotive exchanges in this language (Grice 1975). This approach will offer new insights into the interaction between emotion and pragmatics, revealing how emotive meaning is constructed and interpreted through language and culture.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- (a) How do Chinese speakers use "xihuan" (like) in affection-related emotive communication?
- (b) How do Chinese speakers express "ai" (love), and what underlying factors influence these expressions?
- (c) How do Grice's maxims manifest in the implicatures of emotive communication, and how do these vary across different emotional contexts?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how emotions are communicated within the specific pragmatic and cultural framework of Mandarin Chinese. In doing so, it seeks to advance the theoretical development of intercultural pragmatics and offer practical insights for improving intercultural communication by highlighting the cultural dimensions that shape emotional expression.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pragmatic Perspectives on Emotive Communication

To explore love language, it is crucial to define emotion. This study adopts Averill's (1982) socioconstructivist framework, which posits that emotions are based on appraisals influenced by cultural values, making them inherently social and context-dependent. This aligns with Grice's concept of unnatural meanings, where emotional expressions are seen as intentional and conversationally constructed implicatures.

Historically, emotion has been underexplored in linguistic pragmatics due to its interdisciplinary nature. However, Caffi and Janney (1994) established its viability as a field by re-examining Aristotle's rhetoric, Marty's philosophy, Bally's stylistics, and Prague functionalism. They argued for the importance of studying "emotive communication"—the strategic signaling of affective information to influence interpretations and achieve interpersonal goals—distinguishing it from spontaneous emotional expression. This conceptualization underscores the cultural and social regulation of emotional communication, forming the basis of this study's approach.

Moreover, the interplay between language and affect in multilingual contexts is significant. Dewaele (2008) explored emotional scripts like "I love you," highlighting the variability of emotional weight across languages. His findings inspire this study's focus on the Mandarin term *xihuan* (like), examining its capacity to convey emotional depth and its implications for scalar implicature. Similarly, intercultural communication studies (Gudykunst, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2008) emphasize the impact of cultural differences on emotional expression, reinforcing the need for culturally sensitive analyses.

### 2.2 Psychological Perspectives on Emotional Expression and Cultural Frameworks

Cultural psychology offers a vital lens for understanding emotional expression, emphasizing how cultural norms shape individuals' self-construals and their modes of emotional communication. Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1994) introduced the concepts of independent and interdependent self-construals, describing how Western societies typically value independence, while Eastern societies, such as China, prioritize interdependence. This cultural orientation profoundly influences emotional expression, with interdependent cultures often emphasizing harmony and moderation, leading to more restrained and context-sensitive displays of emotion.

Although Markus and Kitayama's dichotomy has been critiqued as overly simplistic, subsequent research affirms the cultural variability in emotional expressions. For instance, ego-centered emotions like love and anger are expressed in culturally specific ways that align with societal expectations, reflecting the intricate interplay between

individual emotions and cultural norms (Besemeres, 2004). These insights provide a foundation for examining how Chinese cultural norms influence emotive communication, particularly in their focus on indirect and harmonious interactions.

This cultural modulation of emotional expression can be further understood through the framework of contextual anticipatory schemata—cognitive mechanisms that enable individuals to predict and interpret communicative behavior within cultural contexts (Arndt & Janney, 1987). These schemata consist of two interconnected components: global assumptions and situational assumptions. Global assumptions encompass broad, culturally ingrained beliefs about values, emotions, and interpersonal attitudes, providing a stable foundation for interpreting communicative norms. Conversely, situational assumptions are context-specific and adaptable, shaped by prior interactions and immediate cues, allowing individuals to tailor their responses to specific social dynamics.

Together, these schemata guide speakers in navigating social interactions by bridging cultural norms and individual actions. Their adaptability underscores the importance of cultural competence, enabling individuals to anticipate and interpret behaviors effectively in culturally nuanced settings. This interplay between stable cultural frameworks and dynamic situational adjustments highlights the complexity of emotive communication, where meaning is co-constructed through shared cultural knowledge and contextually informed interpretations. Understanding these processes is crucial for analyzing how emotional expression operates within Chinese cultural contexts, where implicit communication and cultural harmony are central to social interaction.

### *2.3 Studies on Chinese Emotional Expression*

Despite the growing focus on emotion in pragmatics, studies on Chinese emotional expression remain sparse. Song (2014) examined emotional lexicons semantically but did not address their pragmatic implications. In contrast, this study adopts a pragmatic lens, analyzing *xihuan* (like) within Chinese sociocultural contexts to explore how speakers navigate emotional intensity in their language choices.

Interpersonal pragmatics, which emphasizes relational dynamics, provides an essential framework for this analysis. Recent studies (Ran & Fan, 2020; Song, 2017) highlight emotion as both a contextual factor and a goal in interaction, affirming its centrality in pragmatic research. Similarly, cultural studies on Chinese communication patterns (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Ye, 2004) reveal the indirectness and politeness strategies that shape emotional expressions. For instance, Chen (2002) demonstrated how face-saving strategies influence the subtlety of emotional communication in Chinese culture.

In summary, emotive communication is inherently sociocultural, involving strategic linguistic choices shaped by cultural norms and interpersonal dynamics. This study enriches the understanding of these processes by examining Chinese emotional expression, contributing to the broader field of interpersonal pragmatics and emphasizing the significance of cultural factors in emotional communication.

## **3. Theoretical Underpinnings**

### *3.1 Grice's Cooperative Principles*

Grice's Cooperative Principle frames linguistic exchanges as dynamic and collaborative processes between speakers and hearers. In his foundational work, Grice (1975) introduced four maxims that define effective communication: Quantity (providing the necessary amount of information), Quality (ensuring truthfulness), Relation (maintaining relevance), and Manner (ensuring clarity and brevity). These maxims aim to outline the features of cooperative and meaningful communicative contributions. For instance, the Maxim of Quantity includes two sub-maxims: providing enough information and avoiding unnecessary elaboration. Similarly, the Maxim of Quality emphasizes avoiding false statements or unsubstantiated claims.

In distinguishing between natural and non-natural meanings, Grice (1957) highlighted how communication often extends beyond explicit content to rely on conversational implicatures—implied meanings drawn from context and shared understanding. Levinson (1983) and Thomas (1995) emphasized that these implicatures bridge what is said and what is meant, playing a critical role in implicit communication. Scalar implicatures, a subset of conversational implicatures grounded in the Maxim of Quantity, illustrate this point. Horn (1972) introduced the "Horn scale," which explains how speakers convey additional meanings by selecting weaker terms on a semantic scale, implicating that stronger alternatives do not apply. This interplay between implicature and truthfulness aligns with the Maxim of Quality, reinforcing Grice's broader framework for cooperative communication.

The universality of Grice's maxims has sparked extensive debate. Horn (1996) argued for their cross-cultural applicability, while Keenan (1976, as cited in Gazdar, 1979) provided counterexamples, such as Malagasy speakers prioritizing less informative utterances, which appear to challenge the Maxim of Quantity. Similarly, Matsumoto (1989) and Blum-Kulka (1990) highlighted cultural variations in communicative practices, particularly in Japan

and Israel, that affect adherence to Gricean maxims. Röhrig (2010) proposed a nuanced view, suggesting that while the prioritization of maxims might vary across cultures, the principles themselves remain universal. For instance, indirectness in Japanese communication reflects cultural preferences for deference, illustrating how maxims adapt to cultural norms.

The application of Grice's maxims to emotional communication further illustrates their relevance. Emotional expression often operates on a scale, with linguistic choices reflecting varying intensities of emotion. For example, in Chinese culture, indirect and context-sensitive language is used to convey emotions while maintaining harmony and respecting face-saving strategies (Chen, 2002). Studies such as Pavlenko (2004) add complexity by highlighting how bilingual individuals express emotions differently depending on linguistic and cultural contexts. This demonstrates that while Grice's principles provide a foundational framework for understanding communication, emotional expressions are shaped by sociocultural factors, reflecting the intricate interplay between language, culture, and emotion.

### *3.2 Connections Between Grice's Theories and Face Theories*

The concept of face, as introduced by Goffman (1967) and expanded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, complements Grice's Cooperative Principle by addressing the emotional and social dimensions of communication. Face refers to the public self-image individuals seek to maintain in interactions, divided into positive face (the desire for approval) and negative face (the desire for autonomy). Politeness Theory outlines strategies for mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs), ranging from direct approaches to more indirect strategies, depending on the social context and perceived threat to face.

The intersection of Grice's maxims and Politeness Theory underscores the dual goals of effective communication and social harmony. The Maxim of Quantity aligns with politeness strategies, as speakers may adjust the amount of information shared to avoid overwhelming the listener or imposing on their face. Similarly, the Maxim of Quality's emphasis on truthfulness often intersects with politeness strategies, as speakers may soften or obscure the truth to protect the listener's face. This can result in deliberate deviations from strict honesty in favor of maintaining social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Relevance, as dictated by the Maxim of Relation, plays a key role in coherent communication but may conflict with politeness when addressing sensitive topics. In such cases, speakers might flout the maxim by avoiding certain subjects to preserve face. The Maxim of Manner, which advocates for clarity, can also clash with politeness considerations, as directness may be perceived as impolite. Speakers often employ circumlocution or indirect language to mitigate potential face threats, prioritizing interpersonal harmony over communicative efficiency (Grice, 1975).

The integration of these theories reveals the complexity of human communication, where linguistic efficiency often gives way to social appropriateness. While Grice's framework emphasizes effective information exchange, Politeness Theory accounts for the social strategies necessary to manage face concerns. Together, these theories highlight the sophisticated balancing act involved in communication, where the interplay of language, emotion, and culture continuously shapes interactions. For instance, Wierzbicka's (1999) exploration of emotion lexicons across cultures illustrates how linguistic structures and cultural scripts converge to influence emotional expression, further enriching our understanding of communicative practices.

## **4. Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the use of love language, particularly the term "xihuan" (to like), in selected Chinese literary works. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide nuanced understandings of language use within literary texts, which are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. The study aimed to offer in-depth insights into how love language is portrayed in Chinese literature and its relation to broader patterns of emotional expression within Chinese culture.

### *4.1 Data Collection, Sampling Strategy, and Socio-Cultural Relevance*

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the use of love language, particularly the term xihuan (to like), in selected Chinese literary works. A qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to provide nuanced insights into language use within literary texts, which are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. The research aimed to uncover how love language is portrayed in Chinese literature and its relation to broader patterns of emotional expression in Chinese culture.

To achieve these objectives, literary discourse analysis was adopted as the primary analytical framework. This method facilitated an in-depth exploration of narrative structures and dialogues, focusing on how characters express love and affection and how these expressions mirror societal norms and values regarding emotional

communication in Chinese society. The analysis was guided by a purposive sampling strategy, which ensured the inclusion of literary works and scenes that exemplify the use of xihuan across diverse emotional and interpersonal contexts.

The study focused on Zhang Ailing's romantic novels, including *Red Rose*, *White Rose* and *Love in a Fallen City*, as well as the military novel *Liang Jian* (*Drawing the Sword*) by Du Liang. Zhang Ailing's works were selected for their intricate portrayals of complex romantic relationships and their nuanced depiction of characters navigating societal constraints and personal desires. For example, *Love in a Fallen City* explores love against the backdrop of war and societal upheaval, illustrating the interplay between individual emotions and larger socio-historical forces. Similarly, *Red Rose*, *White Rose* contrasts romantic passion with pragmatic relationships, shedding light on the linguistic and cultural dimensions of love and affection.

In contrast, *Liang Jian* offers a distinctive perspective by depicting emotional expression within a militaristic and patriotic context. The novel highlights themes of duty, camaraderie, and collective identity, introducing a socio-political dimension to the study of love language. This juxtaposition with Zhang Ailing's more personal and intimate narratives broadens the scope of the analysis, showcasing how xihuan and similar expressions operate across both individual and collective emotional spheres.

In total, thirty-two scenes were selected for analysis, representing diverse contexts ranging from intimate romantic exchanges to public, duty-bound declarations of affection. This selection was guided by the literary significance and socio-cultural relevance of the scenes, ensuring a balanced representation of emotional and linguistic practices. While these fictional narratives reflect imagined events, they also offer valuable insights into broader societal norms and cultural practices.

The portrayal of xihuan in these texts serves as a microcosm of larger social norms and cultural practices related to emotional expression. Literature functions as both a reflection and critique of societal values, providing a unique lens through which the subtleties of love language and interpersonal communication can be studied. Zhang Ailing's observational depth and her engagement with the socio-cultural dynamics of her time situate xihuan within the broader historical and cultural frameworks of emotional expression. Similarly, *Liang Jian*, part of the *New China 70 Years 70 Novels* collection, offers contemporary relevance by illustrating how love language adapts to collectivist ideals and post-revolutionary socio-political influences. Together, these texts illuminate the richness and complexity of xihuan as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon.

#### 4.2 Data Analysis

The selected scenes were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which provided a systematic yet flexible framework for interpreting the linguistic and narrative use of xihuan (to like) within their socio-cultural and literary contexts. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of how xihuan was used to express affection and emotion, while also examining its role in reflecting broader cultural norms and narrative structures.

The analysis began with a careful contextual examination of each instance of xihuan within the selected texts. This involved interpreting its meaning and emotional weight in relation to the surrounding narrative and cultural background. For example, in Zhang Ailing's works, xihuan often appeared in moments of subtle and indirect emotional exchange, reflecting the societal expectations of restrained emotional expression in mid-20th-century Chinese romantic relationships. By contrast, in *Liang Jian*, xihuan was frequently used in expressions of respect and camaraderie, aligning with the novel's patriotic and collectivist themes.

A comparative approach was employed to identify patterns and contrasts across different texts and scenes. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how the emotional and cultural significance of xihuan varied depending on its narrative context. For instance, its usage in private, romantic settings highlighted its role in navigating personal relationships, while its appearance in public, duty-oriented scenarios underscored its adaptability to collective ideals and social expectations.

Through this interpretive process, broader insights were developed to connect the findings with the study's overarching themes of love language and emotional communication in Chinese literature. This analysis not only revealed the multifaceted ways in which xihuan functions as a linguistic tool but also highlighted its capacity to reflect and reinforce cultural values and emotional practices across different historical and social contexts.

### 5. Results

#### 5.1 Example in Zhang Ailing's novels: context of love expression in Chinese culture

Emotive communication relies on a shared cultural context between the speaker and hearer to express love effectively. This process requires the hearer's cooperation and willingness to infer implied meanings beyond literal

expressions, such as interpreting "xihuan" (to like) as indicating deeper emotions like love. According to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, communication is inherently dialogical, with the speaker always anticipating the hearer's potential reactions—whether agreement, critique, or elaboration. This interactive nature of communication highlights relationships as cooperative constructions, shaped by mutual expectations and societal norms. Therefore, the expression of emotions, particularly love, is heavily influenced by social norms and the anticipated reactions of others. Speakers often conform to these expectations, prioritizing social harmony over personal expression. In Chinese culture, where love is considered private and sacred, its expression often avoids direct verbalization and instead relies on actions to convey affection. Much like the cultural taboo surrounding discussions of sex, love in Eastern societies is expressed through acts of care and consideration rather than explicit declarations. In contrast, Western norms may favor overt expressions such as affectionate words and physical gestures like hugs.

Zhang Ailing's works provide rich examples of these cultural differences. For instance, in her novel, a scene reveals how direct expressions of love are often dismissed or viewed as inappropriate in Chinese culture:

Scene 1: Liu Su laughed. 'Why the silence?'

Liu Yuan replied with a smile, 'I've said all I can in public.'

Liu Su chuckled and asked, 'So secretive. What's the matter?'

Liu Yuan explained, 'Some words are so foolish that they should be whispered behind closed doors, not even heard by the speaker themselves. Saying them aloud would embarrass me. Like, "I love you. I'll love you forever."'

Liu Su rolled over and whispered softly, 'Such nonsense!'" (excerpt drawn from *Love in a Fallen City*)

Liu Yuan's hesitation to say "I love you" openly reflects a cultural preference for indirectness, while Liu Su's reaction—describing the declaration as "nonsense" and dismissing it with gestures like spitting—underscores the social norms of restraint and propriety. This interaction highlights how love language in Chinese culture relies more on implicature and context than on direct verbal statements. Liu Su's response aligns with cultural expectations, reinforcing the notion that openly expressing love may be seen as foolish or embarrassing. Public declarations risk being perceived as flirtatious or insincere, a point vividly illustrated in the narrative.

Gender also plays a critical role in shaping the consequences of expressing love. Traditional Chinese society, influenced by feudal values, has historically imposed stricter expectations on women, requiring them to act conservatively. While modern China has evolved, conservative attitudes toward emotional expression still persist. Women who openly express affection may face criticism, while men are often afforded more leeway to avoid embarrassment. For example, Liu Yuan's careful approach in anticipating Liu Su's reaction demonstrates his strategic effort to avoid causing discomfort or losing face, which further reflects the complex interplay between cultural norms and gender expectations.

The concept of face, central to Face Theory, is closely tied to the emotional weight of expressions like "xihuan" and "ai" (to love). Choosing a less intense term like "xihuan" can serve as a face-saving strategy, reducing the risk of rejection. If the partner accepts the expression, it fosters a positive outcome; if rejected, the speaker can downplay the emotional intent as a joke, mitigating any embarrassment. This reserved linguistic approach ensures that emotional communication aligns with cultural norms, avoiding the potential face-threatening consequences of vulnerability. Given that literature often mirrors and reinforces these patterns of reserved communication, the preference for indirectness, exemplified by the frequent use of "xihuan" over "ai," reflects the deeply ingrained cultural anticipation of subtlety in expressing affection. This strategic use of language allows speakers to convey the appropriate emotional weight without violating social conventions. By understanding these cultural nuances, we see how Face Theory shapes both interpersonal communication and the portrayal of emotions in literature. The strategic deployment of terms like "xihuan" illustrates the broader social practices and values embedded in Chinese culture, emphasizing the importance of context and cultural norms in shaping linguistic choices.

### *5.2 Examples in Liang Jian: accompanying contextual factors matter*

The above analysis provides a cultural context in which the "context of situation"-specifically, the expression of love—is examined. Within such cultural anticipatory schemata, examples from *Liang Jian* can offer more details and nuances on how xihuan is used to achieve various purposes and what components, such as deeds and actions, are involved in its meaning-making process.

The story is set during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the subsequent Chinese Civil War. The central character, Li Yunlong, is a brave and unconventional officer in the Eighth Route Army. Amid the chaos of war, he forms deep personal connections, including a complex relationship with Xiu Qin, a resilient countryside woman who falls in love with him. During the civil war, Li Yunlong also becomes romantically interested in Tian Yu, a young woman,

further complicating his personal life. There are mainly two sets of scenes related to the expression of love: 1) Xiu Qin expresses her feelings toward Li Yunlong, and 2) Li Yunlong expresses his feelings toward Tian Yu. Xihuan is employed in both sets of scenes to describe their affection for others, and the following paragraphs will analyze how these effects are realized.

Scene 2: X- Xiu Qin L- Li Yunlong

As Xiu Qin helped Li with the blister on his foot using a needle, she looked up and asked:

X: Captain, what do you think of me?

L: Good. You're active at work.

X: What else?

L: Also, the shoes you make are well crafted, and your heart is kind.

X: Captain, what's wrong with you? The five-foot-tall man doesn't even dare to raise his head when he speaks. I'm a woman from the mountains, uneducated and straightforward. Let me be clear: Captain, I like you.

(Li Yunlong felt embarrassed and laughed.)

L: Xiu Qin, there is a war going on right now. Maybe one day I will...

(Xiu Qin quickly covered his mouth with her hand.)

X: Don't say such unlucky things. You're a hero; how can a hero not have a wife? If you like me, I will be your wife. When you're tired and hungry, I will wash and cook for you. When you're sick, I will take care of you and feel sorry for you. If one day you have a fatal accident, I will mourn for you. When I become your wife, I will be willing to do these things for my whole life. (episode 12)

In this excerpt, "xihuan" is used by the female character Xiu Qin directly after hinting at her affection in a roundabout way by asking Li's opinions about her. This initial inquiry is a subtle attempt to gauge Li's feelings, adhering to traditional indirect forms of communication commonly expected in Chinese culture, particularly among women. Xiu Qin acknowledges her deviation from these norms when she boldly states her affection, highlighting her awareness of and deliberate departure from traditional roundabout expressions of love, which are culturally normative and expected.

"Xihuan" in this context is utilized to convey a deeper meaning of love ("ai"), since Xiu Qin's declaration of "xihuan" implies a desire to marry and become Li's wife. The full expression of her affection is articulated when Xiu Qin elaborates on what "xihuan" or being a wife means to her as a hardworking countryside woman of that era. She lists practical, concrete deeds such as doing housework, cooking, and caring for Li when he is tired, hungry, or sick. These actions are nonverbal expressions of care and affection that align with the Chinese cultural perception that love is demonstrated through actions rather than just words. This reflects the cultural belief that actions speak louder than words in expressing genuine affection. The use of "xihuan" is bolstered by promises of future actions and actual physical gestures within the scene, such as leaning forward to get closer and physically hugging. These nonverbal cues add emotional weight to "xihuan," elevating it to the level of "ai," which is not explicitly stated. This creates an implicature—where the intended meaning is suggested rather than directly stated—while also violating Grice's maxims of quantity and quality. Xiu Qin does not express all her emotions verbally, choosing instead to convey them through nonverbal communication, which still clearly communicates her heartfelt love.

This choice of expression also ties into the cultural concept of face-saving. To avoid potential embarrassment and rejection, Xiu Qin opts for "xihuan" rather than explicitly stating "ai." This indirectness, while still bold for the time, is a strategic way to navigate cultural norms that dictate women should not be overtly expressive of their feelings. By using "xihuan," Xiu Qin adheres to some degree of cultural decorum while also stepping outside of it to ensure her feelings are understood.

Furthermore, Xiu Qin's actions reflect a significant cultural implicature regarding emotional expression in Chinese society. The expectation that emotions, particularly romantic ones, should be conveyed through deeds rather than words is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural and historical contexts. This reflects Confucian values where duty, responsibility, and practical care are paramount in relationships. Xiu Qin's detailed description of her role and duties as a wife encapsulates this cultural norm, indicating that true affection is demonstrated through lifelong commitment and daily acts of service.

Her declaration, although violating the cultural norm of women's passivity in romantic expressions, underscores a shift in cultural attitudes where women are increasingly seen as active participants in expressing their desires and

emotions. This nuanced portrayal aligns with modern interpretations of historical and cultural evolution, highlighting how traditional values are both maintained and challenged in contemporary contexts.

Overall, Xiu Qin's use of "xihuan" in this scene from "Liang Jian" is a rich example of how Chinese cultural norms influence emotional expression. It demonstrates the interplay between verbal and nonverbal communication, the importance of actions in conveying affection, and the strategic use of language to navigate social expectations and preserve face. This complex layering of cultural implicature provides deeper insights into the sociocultural dynamics at play in expressions of love within Chinese literature and society.

Later, there is another scene that displays love. When Li Yunlong patrolled the village at night, he met Xiu Qin again and found that she was waiting for him, or more accurately, for his confirmation of her love.

Scene 3:

X: I don't know what's going on. If I don't see you for a day, I feel empty in my heart.

L: Xiu Qin, I told you before. There's a war going on. Even if I like you, I have to let it go.

X: Why then? Marry me if you like me.

L: Gee, you just don't get it. I can't just marry whoever I like, right? I also like the landlord, Aunt Zhang. Should I marry her too?

X: Aunt Zhang is already married. Of course not. But I am not. You can marry me.

(Li Yunlong anxiously looked around to make sure nobody heard them) (episode 13)

In this scene, Xiu Qin courts Li Yunlong once again, using similar word choices of "xihuan" and equating it with marriage. Here, Li Yunlong makes light of Xiu Qin's use of "xihuan" by focusing on its literal meaning and ignoring the emotional significance behind it. This interaction illustrates that "xihuan" alone does not guarantee marriage; it is the love behind "xihuan" that elevates its significance and creates the connection between affection and the commitment of marriage. This scene further illustrates the complexities of expressing love within the cultural and situational constraints faced by the characters. Xiu Qin's straightforward declaration contrasts with Li Yunlong's hesitant and indirect responses, highlighting the tension between personal desires and social responsibilities. Xiu Qin's use of "xihuan" and her persistent efforts to secure Li's affection despite the ongoing war and societal expectations underscore the depth of her feelings and her willingness to challenge cultural norms. Li Yunlong's cautious behavior and his concern about being overheard reflect the broader societal pressures and the importance of maintaining one's public image, or "face," within the community. This interplay of direct and indirect communication, along with the cultural implications of their dialogue, provides a rich context for analyzing expressions of love and emotional communication in Chinese literature and society.

Later in the story, Li meets another girl for whom he has affection, and he musters up the courage to express his feelings, using 'xihuan' repeatedly to court Tian Yu.

Scene 4: L- Li Yunlong T- Tian Yu

L: Listen, I want you to marry me.

(Tian Yu turned away and sat down, not willing to face Li directly)

L: To tell you the truth, Xiao Tian, I like you. I liked you the first time I saw you... If you agree to marry me, I will be good to you for the rest of my life. Now I only ask you one thing: do you like me?

(Tian Yu remained silent)

L: Not saying anything is a tacit acknowledgment that you like me.

(Tian Yu shook her head)

L: So, you don't like me? Yes or no, can you make it quick? If you don't agree, I'll leave right now, and I won't badger you. Please don't be embarrassed. Of course, things like this should be consensual...

This scene highlights the cultural nuances and communicative strategies involved in expressing affection in Chinese society. Li's straightforward approach contrasts sharply with Tian Yu's reluctance to face him and her initial silence. His repeated use of "xihuan" to convey his deep affection and desire for marriage shows his determination to bridge the gap between affection and commitment. However, Tian Yu's silence and subsequent head shake demonstrate the complexity of interpreting nonverbal cues and the potential for misunderstandings in communication. Li's insistence on a clear, verbal response underscores the importance of explicit consent in relationships, reflecting a shift towards more direct communication while still navigating traditional cultural expectations. Similar to Xiu Qin's usage of "xihuan," in this example, Li equates "xihuan" with marriage, offering



his perspective from a male point of view. His understanding of "xihuan" is expressed through promises like "I will be good to you for the rest of my life", underscoring his commitment. Li uses "xihuan" throughout this interaction instead of "ai" (love), likely to save face and avoid embarrassing Tian Yu. This choice aligns with his character, as he values manhood and the stoicism expected of a soldier. Besides, the term "consensual" further emphasizes the emotional depth that Li attributes to "xihuan," suggesting that it embodies the weight of "ai" rather than its literal meaning of "like." In this sense, "xihuan" carries implicature, extending beyond its surface meaning. While "xihuan" alone does not guarantee marriage, the love (ai) it signifies does.

Using "xihuan" to express affection demonstrates that it is the unmarked, mutually acceptable way for both the speaker and the listener. It shows that Chinese culture allows and attaches more significant meanings to "xihuan" compared to the English word "like." In the Chinese context, love (ai) is encouraged to be felt deeply and to endure throughout life, suggesting a forward-looking perspective that cherishes and takes marriage seriously. By choosing "xihuan" instead of "ai," Li navigates cultural norms and expectations, ensuring that his expression of affection is respectful and considerate. This careful balance between direct and indirect communication reflects the complexity and richness of emotional expression in Chinese literature and society, highlighting how language and culture intertwine in conveying profound emotions. Therefore, accompanying contextual factors are crucial in helping the interlocutor build relationships and positive emotions, as they support and strengthen the meanings of "xihuan" in affective contexts.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Interplay Between Grice's Maxims and Cultural Implicature in Chinese Emotive Communication

#### 1) Expanding Contexts: From Situational to Cultural

Pragmatic studies often emphasize situational contexts, focusing on the immediate circumstances surrounding communication. However, this approach overlooks the importance of cultural contexts, which encompass social norms, historical traditions, and shared conventions. In Chinese culture, communication is deeply embedded in a web of interpersonal relationships, influencing whether speakers choose direct or indirect expressions (Chen & Wang, 2021). This dual focus on situational and cultural contexts is essential for understanding why Chinese speakers frequently use *xihuan* (to like) rather than *ai* (to love), reflecting the subtleties of cultural expectations and emotional expression.

The distinction between high-context and low-context cultures, introduced by Hall (1976), further clarifies these dynamics. High-context cultures like China rely heavily on implicature and contextual cues. Subtle expressions, silence, and understatement carry significant meaning, often surpassing explicit verbal communication in importance (Ephratt, 2012). For instance, *xihuan* often bridges the emotional gap between "like" and "love," challenging Grice's Maxim of Quantity, which assumes that weaker statements exclude stronger meanings. In this context, a less explicit expression can convey profound emotional depth, highlighting the role of cultural norms in shaping conversational implicature. To fully understand emotive communication in Chinese contexts, this study emphasizes the integration of cultural implicature—considering the hearer's background, expectations, and social norms. This approach, which Lin (2005) refers to as a "total-context" perspective, combines situational and cultural factors, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how communication operates within and across cultures.

#### 2) Rethinking Grice's Maxims in Cultural Contexts

While Grice's maxims provide a foundational framework for analyzing conversational implicature, their applicability is not universal. Cultural differences can reshape how these maxims are interpreted and applied (Herawati, 2013; Huang, 2022). For example, the Maxim of Quantity suggests that a weaker statement implies the denial of a stronger one. However, in Chinese communication, weaker expressions like *wo xihuan ni* (I like you) can carry emotional intensity comparable to stronger statements, challenging the assumption that the absence of a stronger term negates its meaning.

Similarly, the Maxim of Manner, which emphasizes clarity and brevity, often conflicts with Chinese communication norms that prioritize indirectness and subtlety (Zhou & Zhang, 2022). Direct expressions are often softened to preserve face and maintain social harmony. For example, *xihuan* is preferred over *ai* as it aligns with cultural values of politeness and emotional restraint, minimizing the risk of embarrassment or rejection.

The balance between honesty and politeness further illustrates how cultural norms influence communication. Honesty is highly valued, but it is often tempered by the need to preserve face. Drawing on Confucian teachings, Chen (2023) redefines face into two categories: Face1, representing personal dignity, and Face2, reflecting public persona. These categories help explain why Chinese speakers adapt their emotional expressions, choosing terms

like xihuan to navigate personal feelings and societal expectations.

This interplay between cultural norms and conversational maxims highlights the limitations of Grice's principles when applied to Chinese contexts. While the Cooperative Principles aim for universal applicability, this study demonstrates how cultural implicature adapts these maxims to suit specific communicative environments. By revealing how indirect expressions like xihuan convey significant emotional weight, the findings underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in pragmatic theories.

## 6.2 Conclusion

This study enhances our understanding of intercultural pragmatics and emotive communication by examining the nuanced use of terms like xihuan (to like) in Mandarin Chinese. It addresses critical gaps in previous research, which has often overlooked how cultural norms shape indirect expressions of emotion, particularly in high-context cultures. The findings reveal that indirect expressions such as xihuan carry significant emotional weight, challenging assumptions that emotional restraint in Asian cultures equates to a lack of expressiveness. In doing so, this study highlights the importance of cultural implicature as a complement to Grice's maxims, showing how conversational principles are adapted to align with the face-saving and context-sensitive values of high-context cultures. These insights bridge theoretical and practical considerations, emphasizing the need for greater awareness of indirect communication strategies in cross-cultural contexts.

This research has significant implications for intercultural communication and language education. For effective intercultural communication, individuals should be aware of cultural norms, such as indirect emotional expressions and the role of face-saving, particularly in high-context settings. Understanding how seemingly understated phrases, like xihuan, can convey deep emotional meaning is essential for fostering mutual respect and reducing miscommunication in cross-cultural interactions. In language education, particularly for learners of Chinese as a second language, these findings underline the importance of incorporating nuanced examples of emotive expressions into curricula. By equipping learners with pragmatic awareness and cultural sensitivity, educators can prepare students for meaningful and contextually appropriate interactions, not only in Chinese but in any setting where cultural norms influence communication.

While this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of cultural implicature, it acknowledges the limitations of using fictional texts as primary data sources. Literary works often dramatize societal norms, potentially diverging from real-world communication patterns. Future research could address this limitation by analyzing real-life conversational events through methods like conversation analysis, which would capture real-time dynamics and evolving linguistic behaviors. Another valuable avenue for exploration involves studying how younger generations, influenced by globalization and digital communication, adapt traditional norms of emotive expression. Comparing these shifts across age groups and cultural contexts could provide a richer understanding of the evolution of cultural implicature. Additionally, similar research in other high-context cultures, such as Japan or Korea, could test the generalizability of these findings and reveal whether cultural implicature operates similarly across different languages and societies. Further theoretical development could integrate relevance theory with cultural implicature, offering a more nuanced perspective on how pragmatic inferences are drawn in emotionally charged interactions. This approach would provide deeper insights into how culture mediates the balance between explicit and implicit communication strategies.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the intricate dynamics of Chinese emotive communication and its broader cross-cultural implications. By highlighting the role of cultural implicature in shaping conversational strategies, the research advances the theories of intercultural pragmatics and contributes practical recommendations for improving communication across cultural boundaries. Ultimately, this work deepens our understanding of how emotions are communicated in diverse linguistic and cultural settings, promoting more effective and harmonious interactions that bridge cultural differences and foster mutual understanding.

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