Ingratiation, Attractiveness, and Interpretational Relation of Youths

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Abstract The aim of the research is to understand the relationships between ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpersonal relation. To achieve the aim, the research interviews 109 Hong Kong youths by using the method of online questionnaire survey. The research findings first suggest that self-presentation, other enhancement, favor rendering, and modesty are the ingratiation tactics among the youths, but self-presentation and favor rendering have significant impacts on interpersonal relation of the youths. Second, the findings show that attractiveness consists of two factors, which are social attraction and physical attraction. The physical attraction is positively related to interpersonal relation, but social attraction does not. However, the physical attraction does not determine the youths' interpersonal relation because a regression analysis illustrates an insignificant effect of physical attraction to interpersonal relation. Accordingly, ingratiation may not necessarily increase one's attractiveness and then interpersonal relation. Based on the findings, the research gives recommendations to improve the social life of the youths.

Keywords: *ingratiation, attractiveness, interpretational relation, youth*

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the body of knowledge by the investigation of the pattern of Hong Kong youths' ingratiation.

1. Introduction

Ingratiation is a kind of social behaviors constantly affecting people's social lives and interpersonal relations in every society (Ralston, 1985). In this sense, everyone may intentionally or unintentionally ingratiate someone or be ingratiated by someone. Although ingratiation should be a significantly common social psychological phenomenon wherever people situate, many researchers are only concerned about it in workplace contexts (Tsang, 2014). As a result, our understandings of ingratiation becomes narrow and incomplete (Tsang, 2014). In order to supplement the limitation in the literature, it is necessary to study ingratiation outside workplace contexts. In recent years, some researchers start to conduct research on youths' ingratiation (Marin & Wilson, 2012; Tsang, 2009a; Tsang & Lian, 2010). The research generally suggests that it is quite common for youths to ingratiate in school contexts and ingratiation may cause desirable outcomes to the youths, such as positive development and subjective well-being. The reason why ingratiation has the positive impacts on the youths is that ingratiation may empower them to build up positive interpersonal relations which provide them with desirable social resources such as trust, social support, and sense of security. Nevertheless, the research on youths' ingratiation is still deficient. Thus, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the relationship between ingratiation and well-being among youths (Tsang, 2009a). Hence, the present research aims to contribute to

2. The Concept Of Ingratiation

In the literature, ingratiation has been conceptualized as a set of behaviors used to enhance social actors' attractiveness (Bohra & Pandey, 1984; Cooper, 2005; Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Tsang & Lian, 2010; Varma, Toh, & Pichler, 2006). Thus, researchers generally refer ingratiation as attraction-seeking behaviors (Tsang, 2009a). This term implies that social actors ingratiate because they want to become more attractive in the eyes of others.

It is noted that ingratiation is culture-specific (Pandey, 1981). Therefore, when researchers study ingratiation in different cultures or cultural groups, they may indicate different patterns of ingratiation. Jones and Wortman (1973) discover four types of ingratiation tactics in the US, including other-enhancement, conformity, favor-rendering, and self-presentation. Bohra and Pandey (1984) finds out four more ingratiation tactics in the Indian society, including name-dropping, situation-specific behavior, instrumental dependency, and self-depreciation. A studies conducted by Tsang (2009a, 2009b) who investigates ingratiation among Hong Kong youths identify that modesty is a common ingratiation tactic, in addition to conformity, favor-rendering, and other-enhancement.

In addition, the natures of ingratiation may be slightly different from cultures to cultures, from societies to

societies. In the western cultures or societies, ingratiation has been regarded as immoral acts. For instance, Jones (1964, p. 11) defines ingratiation as “a class of strategic behavior illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one’s personal qualities” according to the western culture. On the contrary, Pandey (1981) illustrates that ingratiation is a normal rather than immoral act in Indian society. In Chinese societies, Tsang (2009a, 2009b, 2014) and Tsang, Ng, and Wang (2013) show that ingratiation can be expressive or instrumental. That means Chinese people ingratiate because they just want to develop good interpersonal relations or social attraction (expressiveness) or because they aspire to exchange tangible (e.g. money) or intangible (e.g. social support) with others. Although the debate about whether ingratiation is a normal or immoral act is not yet solved, it is better to view ingratiation as a normal act since we cannot deny that some people may ingratiate without any instrumental, immoral, or illicit intentions (Varma et al., 2006).

Accordingly, ingratiation is defined as a set of social behaviors used by social actors to enhance their attractiveness in the eyes of others and the set of social behaviors is not necessarily immoral, illicit, or instrumental.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Procedure and Sample

The study involved an Internet survey in which an online questionnaire was posted on an Internet forum, U21 (<http://u21.hk>). The questionnaire was posted on the Internet forum for 40 days. During the period of time, it invited Hong Kong youths who were aged between 12 and 25 year-old to fill in the questionnaire. The reason why choose the forum was the U21 was one of the popular forms during the data collection period of time and its major target was Hong Kong youth aged between 6 and 35 year-old. Up to data collection period, there were over 27,000 Hong Kong youths visited the forum. Another reason to choose the forum rather than others was that most of Internet forum in Hong Kong did not allow post any online.

At the end of the data collection, there were 442 Hong Kong youths visited the questionnaire and 116 submitted the completed questionnaires. It was identified that 7 invalid questionnaires. Thus, the sample size of the present study was 109.

3.2. Measurement

The 19 items measuring Chinese ingratiation constructed by Tsang (2009a, 2009b) were used to measure ingratiation. The items were rated from strongly agree (score = 5) to strongly disagree (score = 1).

Attractiveness was used by the measurement of interpersonal attraction developed by McCroskey and McCain (1974). The measurement was used to measure three dimensions of attractiveness, including social attraction, physical attraction, and task attraction. There were 11 items in the measurement. Each item was rated from strongly agree (score = 5) to strongly disagree (score = 1).

Tsang’s (2009a) four items followed by a rating scale that ranged from strongly agree (score = 5) to strongly

disagree (score = 1) were used to measure interpretational relation.

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity

The results showed the reliabilities of the measurements of ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpretational relation were respectively .849, .733, and .792. In order to identify the factor structure of ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpretational relation, principal component factor analyses with the varimax rotation were computed. Tables 1 and 2 showed the factor structure of ingratiation ($KMO = .742$) and attractiveness ($KMO = .700$). For interpretational relation, the factor analysis showed that the measurement contained one factor, which was named as interpretational relation explaining 72.53% of variance ($KMO = .644$).

Table 1. Factor structure of ingratiation

Item	Factor			
	Self-presentation	Conformity	Favor-rendering	Modesty
15	.907	.052	.107	-.032
14	.900	.050	.039	.174
13	.872	.276	.038	.079
12	.745	.218	.330	-.051
7	.227	.832	.132	.022
5	-.091	.772	.182	-.190
6	.224	.742	.092	.187
3	.265	.618	.009	.365
11	.139	.533	.003	.488
2	.318	.508	.320	.189
17	-.302	.486	.391	-.319
9	.099	-.018	.858	-.127
10	.027	.033	.804	.041
4	.197	.158	.761	.007
1	.283	.238	.755	.094
8	-.094	.210	.0438	.242
19	-.180	-.165	.062	.761
18	.052	.285	.043	.742
16	.216	.056	.127	.656
Eigenvalue	5.737	2.624	2.271	1.703
Variance	30.193	13.812	11.955	8.961
α	9.18	.807	.845	.646

Table 2. Factor structure of attractiveness

Item	Factor	
	Social attraction	Physical attraction
6	.811	.120
1	.796	.131
3	.764	-.003
5	.699	.107
4	.657	.042
7	-.480	.329
2	.471	-.015
11	.124	.931
10	.151	.916
8	.067	.892
9	-.493	.546
Eigenvalue	2.225	1.990
Variance	32.51	26.49
α	.733	.853

4.2. Correlation and Regression Analyses

Some studies indicated that gender may affect the relationship between ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpretational relation (e.g. Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002; Strutton, Pelton, & Lumpkin, 1995), so the study studied the relationship between the variables by controlling for gender. The results suggested that self-presentation was

positively related to physical attraction ($r = .547, p < .01$) and interpersonal relation ($r = .474, p < .01$); conformity was positively related to social attraction ($r = .287, p < .01$), physical attraction ($r = .299, p < .01$), and interpersonal relation ($r = .465, p < .01$); favor-rendering was positively related to interpersonal relation only ($r = .465, p < .01$); and modesty was insignificantly related to social attraction, physical attraction, and interpersonal relation (see Table 3).

Table 3. The relationships between ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpersonal relation after controlling for gender

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Self-presentation						
2 Conformity	.360*					
3 favor-rendering	.206*	.352**				
4 Modesty	-.008	.181	.212*			
5 Social attraction	.054	.287**	-.189	.037		
6 Physical attraction	.547**	.299**	.039	-.025	.115	
7 Interpersonal relation	.474**	.416**	.465**	.158	-.051	.359**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

In addition, the research would like to test a hypothesis that ingratiation is positively correlated to interpersonal relation. Thus, a partial correlation analysis was computed by controlling for gender, social attraction, and physical attraction. Table 4 showed that the ingratiation tactics of self-presentation, conformity, and favor-rendering was positively and significantly correlated to interpersonal relation, but the ingratiation tactic of modesty was insignificantly correlated to interpersonal relation.

Table 4. The relationships between ingratiation, attractiveness, and interpersonal relation after controlling for gender, social attraction and physical attraction

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Self-presentation					
2 Conformity	.258**				
3 favor-rendering	.223*	.433**			
4 Modesty	.008	.194*	.225**		
5 Interpersonal relation	.356**	.390**	.476**	.184	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

Accordingly, self-presentation, conformity, modesty, and physical attraction were significantly related to interpersonal relation. However, the above correlation analyses did not show the predictive power of the variables to interpersonal relation. Thus, a multi-regression analysis was used to serve to differentiate the predictive power of the variables. The regression model exhibited an adjusted R square of .348 ($F(4, 104) = 15.41, p < .001$). This means that 34.8 percent of the variance in interpersonal relation was explained by this model. Table 5 indicated that self-presentation and conformity were significant predictors of interpersonal relation among the four independent variables. Compared with conformity, self-presentation had greater predictive power.

Table 5. Predicting interpersonal relation with the variables of self-presentation, conformity, favor rendering, and physical attraction

Predictor	B	SE	β
Self-presentation	.199	.058	.324**
Conformity	.125	.067	.165
Favor rendering	.209	.060	.291**
Physical attraction	.060	.061	.090

** $p < .01$.

4.3. Differences between Age Groups

In order to see whether there were differences between age groups in ingratiation practices, attractiveness, and interpersonal relation, the analysis further divided the sample into three age groups, including late childhood (12-17 year-old) and young adult (18-25). Then, an independent samples t test was computed. The results suggested that there were no significant differences between the two groups of youths in ingratiation practices, attractiveness, and interpersonal relation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings suggest that Hong Kong youths engage in the ingratiation tactics of self-presentation, other enhancement, favor rendering, and modesty. It is noted that not all of the ingratiation tactics are correlated to interpersonal relation. Moreover, the findings demonstrate physical attraction is positively related to interpersonal relation, but the relationship between social attraction and interpersonal relation is insignificant. It is noted that the findings do not mean physical attraction determines the youths' interpersonal relation because the regression analysis illustrate the insignificant effect of physical attraction to interpersonal relation. Accordingly, it seems that ingratiation may not necessarily increase one's attractiveness and in turn their interpersonal relation. As a result, regarding ingratiation as a set of behaviors improving one's attractiveness in the eyes of others, what many people have believed, may not be correct.

There are some meaningful issues for further discussion here. First, there is a social norm that requires people to unconditionally give favors to those who in needs in Chinese culture (Hwang, 1987; Yang, 1995). If Chinese people violate the social norm, they may be labeled as a bad people; on the other hand, they may be labeled as a normal or even good people, if they follow the social norm. Therefore, those who know how to give and do favor in a suitable time generally are the sociable persons (Liu, 2001; Yang, 1995). In this sense, favor rendering should be an ingratiation tactic positively affecting one's attractiveness and interpersonal relation among Chinese

youths. Nevertheless, the findings do not support the idea. One possible explanation is that favor rendering may induce the ingratiatee to perceive that he or she owes the ingratiator (Tsang, 2014), which creates certain psychological stress to him or her to return the ingratiation (Zhai, 2011). The psychological consequence of the ingratiation tactic may discourage the Hong Kong youths to perform it (Tsang, 2009a, 2009b).

In general, modesty is regarded as a favorable trait in Chinese culture, so Chinese people should be willing to develop social contact with modest persons (Gu, 1990; Spencer-Oatey & Ng, 2001). Nevertheless, the findings reflect that modesty, as an ingratiation tactic, is insignificantly related to social attraction, physical attraction, and interpersonal relation. According to Tsang (2009a, 2009b), impoliteness may become a sub-culture among Hong Kong youths nowadays. In other words, the Hong Kong youths may not welcome those who exhibit the trait of modesty as much as other Chinese people. Thus, the ingratiation tactic of modesty (acting modestly) may not positively relate and even influence the youths' attractiveness and interpersonal relation.

The research implies that the youths who are physically attractive may be easier to develop interpersonal relation than the youths who are socially attractive. Moreover, the findings show that task attraction is not a dimension of attractiveness, which only consists of social and physical attractions, among the Hong Kong youths. These findings imply that the Hong Kong youths may overlook the importance of social and task attractions in social lives. That means they may think their physical appearance is more important than social skills and task ability in social lives and relationship. However, as we know, when a person only has a good outlook but lacks any social skill and task ability, he or she may face many difficulties in their development. In other words, we may need to correct that notion of the youths if our inference is correct.

One of the limitations of the study is generalizability. The sample size of the study is 109 Hong Kong youths who were aged between 12 and 25 year-old selected by voluntary sampling, which is a non-probabilistic sampling obtaining data on the basis of the use of volunteer participants (Hewson, Yule, Laurent, & Vogel, 2003). Therefore, the results of the research may not be generalized to a large population. Second, Tsang (2009a, 2009b, 2014) recently hypothesizes that ingratiation is not merely a set of attraction-seeking behaviors, but also a set of relation (guanxi) management strategies in Chinese context. The relation management strategies may influence interpersonal relation via the exercise of one's face (mianzi) and favor (renqing) in addition attractiveness. However, the study does not investigate the hypotheses. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies investigate the relationship between ingratiation, the use of face, the use of favor, the use of attractiveness, and interpersonal relationship in both Chinese and non-Chinese contexts with a larger sample size.

There are some implications of the research. First, according to the research findings, ingratiation, especially the tactics of self-presentation and favor rendering, may have some positive influences to youths' interpersonal relation rather than attractiveness. In other words, ingratiation may be a means for them to improve their relationship with others, if they are less physically and

socially attractive. In addition, the findings imply the youths may just appreciate the physical attraction instead of social and task attraction in interpersonal relation. As discussed, this may be unhealthy for the youths' social and psychological development. Thus, we may need to facilitate them develop a prior outlook on the relationship between attractiveness and interpersonal relationship.

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