**Manipulative Practices of Programming and Controlling Employee Behaviour in the Activities of Chinese Managers**

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**Abstract**

Manipulative practices in the activities of managers of Chinese organisations can be regarded as a special social engineering, as "mind engineering" of employees of organisations, "brainwashing", "mind control", i.e. as a set of latent strategies, principles and techniques of influence on the organisation. The techniques, methods and tactics of managers' manipulative practices add up to a set of manipulative practices of interaction with subordinates and may look like stable universal systems that make up the traditional set of manipulations. But not only that. In non-standard situations, in each special case and depending on practical expediency, the manager may develop and implement his internal manipulative attitudes and beliefs as new, unique forms of manipulations, new standards of communication, behaviour and decision-making that are most suitable for programming and controlling the behaviour of subordinates in the new situation. These new situations develop and refine traditional techniques and methods of manipulative practices. Managers in Chinese organisations who have developed and continually improved manipulative practices appear more successful because there is less bureaucratic management, long briefings and meetings in their management activities. According to some researchers, the developed manipulative ability of managers to program and control the behaviour of subordinates can be seen as an advantage and a higher level of professionalisation.

**Introduction**

In Chinese mainland sociology, manipulative programming and behavioural control practices of employees in organisations are viewed through the traditional concept of "Jiao hua" (literally "training and nurturing"), which translates into the adoption of attitudes towards managers that imply a high degree of trust in them and a willingness to do their bidding (Zhao 2005: 85-88). This is logical, because it is generally accepted that any managerial activity can be seen as a set of manipulative practices that shape the expedient behaviour of employees in organisations to achieve activity goals (Babiuk 2004: 128). In general, Chinese management theory recognises such practices as legitimate, although they are not very common as topics of sociological research. It can also be said that ethical problems in this aspect are perceived rather tolerantly by the Chinese, without fear or demands for legal restrictions (Molchanov 2019: 58, 67). In particular, studies by M. Berman show that it is impossible to completely exclude the elements of neuroeconomic and neurolinguistic research of programming practices or manipulative control over staff behaviour from the practical work of organisations (Berman 2004: 497–546). However, it should always be remembered that in the Chinese tradition the recognition of the primacy of morality, reputation and sharp condemnation of any kind of dishonesty in the conduct of business, occupies an important part of the study of the activities of managers (Tong 2022).

Manipulation is based on one of the basic properties of consciousness (Stepanenko 2012: 166), which is the involuntary and unilateral perception of information (Kilmashkina 2021: 442), since any control is in a sense always coercive in nature and aims at covert programming and inspection of the volitional, intellectual and emotional efforts of the control object and the implementation of the will and power of leaders.

Manipulative practices can be seen as a reflection of the manager's internal attitudes and external forms of their manifestation (Lobanova 2019: 450) in essence, manipulation is externally manifested as a set of methods and techniques of programming the behaviour of subordinates applied by the manager.

**Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Study**

The *subject of this topical study* was to identify the manipulative practices of Chinese executives and the different social groups’ attitudes towards manipulation. The *research questions* involved identifying the manipulative practices of Chinese organisational leaders and examining the attitudes of Chinese several social groups towards manipulative practices, i.e. answering the questions: 1. What are the scholarly positions of highlighting the manipulative practices of Chinese executives from a sociological-historical perspective? 2. What are the manipulative practices of modern Chinese leaders? 3. What are the attitudes to manipulation of respondents working in different spheres of activity: managers, public service officers, military personnel, intellectuals, engineers and medical workers; employees of large and small business organisations and young entrepreneurs; attitudes to manipulation of representatives of the older generation and youth; peculiarities of attitudes to manipulation of respondents with and without managerial experience.

The research strategy implied the consecutive solution of *three tasks*: review of research sources revealing the role of manipulation in managerial practice; defining of manipulative practices as an object of sociological research in modern research materials; conducting an empirical study to reveal the attitude to manipulative practices of respondents from different social groups. The *random probability* sample of the study was n=1472 respondents – representatives from different socio-professional groups shown earlier. *Ethical considerations* were taken into account and all participants gave informed consent. The *key indicators* of the empirical study were the characteristics of respondents' interaction with managers, assessment of the socio-psychological profile of managers (using a questionnaire), in particular, such quality of managers as "manipulation of others". *Statistical methods* were used for data processing (calculation of the arithmetic mean on a 5-point ordinal scale). The *limitations of the methods* used are due to some complications with the translation of the socio-psychological qualities of Chinese managers proposed for evaluation; the expediency of verifying the results; the use of heterogeneous approaches in the study of manipulation; the small sample size and the lack of qualitative methods.

In the following sections of the article, the results of our study will be presented and discussed in detail.

**A historical and sociological overview of manipulation as an element of governance**

Manipulation has always accompanied human governance since the earliest human communities and is, in a sense, an inherent attribute of governance in any society (Knyazeva 2010: 220-221). It is known that Shen Dao, long before Machiavelli, suggested that a ruler should combine strength and charm in order to govern more effectively. In his view, 'being dignified' is not enough to subdue the people, for these purposes you must have the power to 'subdue the dignified' (Udaltsov 2007: 664). Under market relations, manipulation becomes a mass and commonplace practice of social interaction: manipulation creates the modern world (Yurenkov 2013: 21-23). It should be noted that although a considerable number of socio-humanitarian academics have studied manipulation, not much attention has been paid to the genesis of the phenomenon (Bernays 2012: 149-159). We have identified several approaches to the historical evolution of the phenomenon of manipulation.

According to the first approach, manipulation has existed "forever" (Makarovsky 2009: 164-172). Magical forces, rituals and ceremonies, gods and sacrifices were the basis for influencing people, a way of social programming and control, reproducing actual forms of behaviour and patterns of activity. The Olympian gods were known to have a clear hierarchy, with some gods subordinate to others. It was this, according to some authors, that gave rise to man's conscious perception of hierarchical relationships and the recognition of a system where one member of society controlled another. D.A. Makarovski proves that the function of social control appears with the birth of human society, and manipulation appeared during the transition from the family community to the neighbourhood community, when the first inter-group conflicts arise. Further, in the slave period, manipulation is explored as the open and perverse nature of the leadership-slavery relationship, where the master-slave relationship was built on a local level of direct influence - interpersonal open manipulation (Grachev 2003: 450). Actually, for reasons such as these, manipulation is later seen as a factor in ethical problems. The question how relevant these problems are remains open. In 2014, a Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues was established in the US to investigate the bioethical issues surrounding the use of neurotechnological manipulation technologies that have an impact on stratification problems, the emergence of special groups and the disclosure of personal data (Jones 2014: 224-236). However, no unequivocal conclusions have been reached by the commission.

The second approach we identify was by Grachev and Melnik (2004), who describe the transformation and expansion of manipulative practices since the ancient Chinese era, when in the early stages manipulation was reflected only in certain areas of interaction and over time spread to all areas of human life. The Chinese scholars began to grasp the ancient Chinese conceptions of ruling by "implanting" ideas convenient for rulers in human consciousness quite early: in1906 the Chinese philosopher and popularizer of sociology Zhang Binlin wrote that Confucianism was used by the rulers to foster passivity in the masses, to eradicate the desire to participate in affairs of governing the country (Taiyan 1906). The early twentieth-century debate in China exposed the considerable social contradictions (Kremnyov 2019: 116-142) caused by the centuries-old manipulation of the public mind through traditional values (Zhang 1960), philosophy and educational system, religious cults (Changing 1903) etc. The representatives of the other approach, on the contrary, point out that manipulation acquired its status only during the formation of *industrial society* (Limnatis 2000: 31). The division of labour and stratification of society play an important role here (Babiuk 2004: 128 21).

The next approach links the emergence of manipulation not so much to the development of social life forms, but to *domination and subjugation*. For instance, Ortega y Gasset writes of the need for a spiritual dictatorship. "Most people have no opinion. People have only value judgments ... But without opinions, human society would be chaos, even more so, 'historical nothingness', so opinions 'must be squeezed into people under pressure from outside, like lubricating oil into a machine' (Knyazeva 2010: 220-221). Such pressure is manipulative influence, which becomes a forced practice of interaction. This role of management as a tool for "overcoming irrationality" through the actualization of "correct", "rational" behavior as conceived by leaders is pointed out by many Chinese sociologists, in particular Zhao Lili and Qiu Xihua (Zhao 2005:85-88). In some cases, the obligatory manipulative function is attributed not only to the governance process per se, but also to the sciences that study it. For example, Yuan Shaoqing and Tao Wenjun point out that a Marxist sociology of governance should, "based on human needs and motives, through the coordination and control of social groups and interpersonal relations in governance, stimulate and induce human behaviour, prevent and correct irrational modes of action, and eliminate factors that hinder the implementation of governance goals" (Yuan 1987:58-61).

In addition to the above three approaches, another concept should be highlighted, according to which manipulation in the activities of leaders spreads through the media in the information society (Chernikova 2015:141-144). Sociologists of different countries and orientations attribute a new stage in the development of manipulative practices to the widespread use of the media as a means of power control: "Radio programmes and advertising are replacing intimidation and violence" (Kara-Murza 2005: 35). The aim of manipulation through the mass media can be identified as introducing certain attitudes into people's subconscious and shaping behaviour patterns.

If we look at manipulative interaction practices at the micro-level, at the organisational level, they originated from the earliest forms of interaction between managers and subordinates. With the transformation of forms of ownership and the emergence of new types of labour relations interaction, the nature of manipulative influence of organisational leaders has also changed. Manipulative practices in managers' activities are particularly widespread in today's information (digital) societies.

**Manipulative practices of managers as an object of sociological analysis**

The notion of manipulation is used in both everyday and scientific senses. The word 'manipulation' has Latin roots 'manus', which originally meant 'hand, handful' (Shanskiy 2004), i.e. originally manipulation meant a certain action with the hands, as a trick or fraud. So even today the term 'manipulation' is mostly perceived negatively at a mundane level. The etymology of another word - management - is also linked to the concept of hand. As sources indicate, the Italian 'maneggiare' ('to manage; to touch with the hands'), also goes back to the Latin manus 'hand' (Etymology 2023). Manipulation and management are therefore, both conceptually and substantively, associated with the activity of leading people. The Chinese terms are similarly comparable, only in a different, ideographic key: thus, the sign of 'hand' (扌) is present as a semantic sign both in the first character of the lexical unit with the meaning of "manipulation" (操纵) and in the first character of the word "governance" (控制).

In the sociological encyclopaedia, manipulation is understood as the means of social influence on people by means of various economic, political, social means and mass media. At the same time, the purpose of such influence is considered to be the imposition of certain ideas, values, forms of behaviour, etc (Manipulation 2004). The main areas of study of manipulation in sociology include the following: 1) Manipulation of public opinion, public consciousness (Kara-Murza 2005; Dotsenko 2003; Sheinov 2006; Chaldini 2012; Gorin 2013: 120-126); 2) Manipulation in mass media (Lisova 2015: 52; Chernikova 2015: 141-144; Malyukova 2011: 105-109); 3) Manipulation technologies in political sphere (Gorin 2013: 120-126); 4) Manipulation practices in pedagogy (Gudina 2014: 14-21); 4) Manipulation in organization (Nuridzhanov 2013).

**Distinctive social features of managers' manipulative practices as an object of sociological research**

First, managers' manipulative practices take place in a direct contact environment, and therefore, in sociology, they should be seen as a special form of interpersonal *interaction* (Kuptsov 2004: 91-106). This distinguishes the sociological interpretation from pedagogical, managerial and other definitions of the concept, which traditionally emphasize the one-sided nature of manipulation: as "impact" (management, pedagogy), "influence" (psychology, political science) or "use" (economics). Society is a unified holistic system of connections and interactions (Weber 1990), and management, in terms of Chinese principles, becomes more effective if the manager enables employees of the organisation to "maintain morale and a sense of the success of their work" (Hu 1995: 14-21).

Second, a study of theoretical sources in sociology shows that manipulation involves the exclusion (circumvention) of consciousness, disregard for the interests and values of others, which is defined as its essential characteristic. On the contrary, we believe that a sociological understanding of manipulation cannot ignore people's interests and values. Obviously, at least in all manipulative interactions there are always two facets of social consequences, which can be characterized as "functional" and "dysfunctional," depending on the value bases of the participants' actions. In Chinese sociology, for example, the problem of the value bases of governance is one of the key issues (Gong 2014). All this makes the problem of exploring the value basis of managers' manipulative practices as a specific feature of this phenomenon.

Thirdly, the sociological understanding of manipulation should guide the definition of this category in correlation with the goals that the manager-manipulator invents for the addressee and seeks to embed them in addressee’s psyche (Dotsenko 2003). Relying on the concepts of Interpretive sociology, we classify leaders' manipulative practices as an ideal type of social action – purposive action (Coleman 2004: 35-44). According to M. Weber's basic assumptions, purposive action is an individual's action oriented to expect certain behaviour of other people and the state of external world objects, as well as rationally regulating goals, means and side effects of one's own behaviour, oriented to achieve success (Weber 1990). In other words, in purposive-rational action, the subject of social action is aware one's own goal, rationally determines the means of achieving this goal (Kultygin 2004: 27-36) and relates one's own behaviour to the desired and possible reactions of others. With the criterion of effectiveness of such action being the achievement of success, this applies in full to the activities of a manager as well (Zhang 1987).

Fourth, the manipulative practices of managers in sociology should be seen as practices of covert and overt interaction. Modern researches predominantly consider the covert nature of manipulation, with the object acting as a "victim" of such control. Many authors dealing with the problem of manipulation refer to the works of V. P. Sheinov (Sheinov 2006; 2007; 2009) and equate the concepts of "manipulation" and "covert management". Covert control is such influence of the initiator on the addressee, when the addressee takes decisions, performs actions conceived by the initiator, without feeling the influence exerted (Sheynov 2006).

Thus, manipulative practices of managers in sociology should be understood as socially conditioned interactions between the initiator (manager) and the object of organizational relations (subordinates), in which, explicitly or implicitly, various means are used to achieve the organizational goals of the initiator, while the goals and values of the interaction object may not be considered, which affects changes in the relationship structure, with both possible positive and negative consequences.

**Manipulative practices of managers in Chinese organisations**

By using the notion of 'practices', we emphasise the habitual, i.e. more or less common forms of manipulation in managers' activities that bring together specific techniques, methods and tactics. The above devision is important to note because manipulation techniques, methods and tactics are often equated the research works. In our view, it is useful to treat manipulation techniques as specific actions or methods of manipulation (there are many such specific actions). For example, these could be: using terms and concepts which are not familiar to the subordinate; affecting the emotions of others; creating an impression of short deadlines to achieve the goals of the organisation more quickly; emphasising the uniqueness and unexpectedness of the work to be done; regular exposure in significant areas of the organisation; breaking down the problem into parts (when only part of the necessary information is given to employees); taking specific information about the content of the forthcoming work out of the context; modifying information in a different way from that of the actual work; modifying information according to one's own opinion (mixing facts with the leader's opinion); referring to authority when setting goals for activities; highlighting stereotypes, generally accepted patterns of behaviour in similar situations (Kara-Murza 2005). The specific techniques of manipulation mentioned below allow managers to unobtrusively program the minds of employees in the organisation in the desired direction.

*Manipulation techniques and methodologies* can include a combination of the specific manipulation techniques shown earlier and manipulation steps arranged in a specific sequence. Such techniques can effectively program or control the behaviour of organisational staff over a period of time. For example, a set of manipulations that allow for less painful relationship building when there is a change in the management structure of an organisation or a reduction in staff.

Rather, *manipulation tactics* can be represented as a line or trajectory of using manipulation techniques and methods. Tactics can, for example, be characterised as harder or, conversely, softer manipulation.

*Manipulative practices* are the most generalised concept and in this case are understood as a set of sustained manipulative techniques, methods and tactics used by managers most frequently and developed into a manipulative experience that is established and based on positive leadership outcomes and in conscious goal-setting aimed at programming and controlling employee activities and behaviour.

Building on our review of works on managers' manipulative practices (Smith 1990, 2011), we will try to systematise the main characteristics of these practices (Pavlova 2013, 16-45). To summarise, we can say that manipulative practices of managers are most consistently implemented in the process of various negotiations (Stasevich 2007), both with employees of the organisation and with external agents, stakeholders, customers, suppliers and competitors: "The negotiation process is implemented in all those situations of interpersonal interaction in which interests are agreed or clarified (mutually or unilaterally)" (Grachov 2004). Alternatively, we can say that manipulation is primarily relevant in typical managerial situations and communications. There is a certain stereotypical feature of such manipulations, irrespective of the specific situation in which the interaction takes place. The specific manipulative techniques (they will be described in this article below) in standard situations change only slightly. In particular, a manager's manipulative practices may not change in situations of hiring personnel or exercising ongoing control, regulating the work process, or dealing with crisis situations, dismissal, and so on. In such different situations the manager has to act traditionally by diagnosing the position of the subordinate and then determining the 'targets' of influence and implementing manipulation tactics to achieve the goals: asserting the authority of the leader, negotiating in terms of crises, striving for loyalty and establishing a hierarchy of relationships, achieving discipline and obedience of subordinates and constitutionalising limits of authority and responsibility (Grachov 2002).

There are some consistent characteristics in the manipulative practices of Chinese managers, the basis of which are the following manipulation techniques – stratagems of programming and controlling subordinates, which sufficiently reflect the general management system in China. It is the stratagem thinking of the Chinese, as well as Confucianism and the peculiarities of the PRC as a state, that form the Chinese national style of conducting any executive negotiation (Lewis 2013).

*Generalisations*, i.e. combining certain phenomena into a general category which in most cases has positive connotations (Odintsova 1956). In the case of Chinese managerial mind engineering the supervisor tries to set the object of his influence in a benevolent manner, e.g. by saying 'my friends', as it is important for the Chinese to maintain and develop a 'spirit of friendship' and to establish informal relationships with partners (Papulova 2015).

*Reference group*. Let’s consider this example in combination with compliments: emphasizing the importance of the employee's actions in the eyes of the team ("Everyone in the company sees how well you perform the task"); indicating a high mark for the employee's actions in the eyes of the manager ("I personally appreciate the fact that you have performed tasks so well"). Here we see a reference group of different reference groups in addition to compliments. The effectiveness of such practices in China is largely due to the collectivist social orientation of the Chinese in general and in management in particular: the average Chinese seeks to create strong social ties – guanxi (关系) and wants social approval (Song 2009).

*Labelling.* This practice refers to abusive language, metaphorical expressions (Hovland 1957) such as 'insiders'/'outsiders' (自己人/圈外人) in combination with other manipulation techniques, is not aimed at humiliation, but at getting a feedback after the manipulation (Nikitina 2019). The supervisor would only insult the subordinate if the technique is used incorrectly, which is why the manager must be very clever in combining it with other techniques. For example, if a Chinese employee is directly or indirectly labelled as an 'outsider', he feels himself being outside the group, loses his sense of security and self-confidence, and will try to get into the circle of 'insiders'.

*Reference to authority*, which implies an urgency to listen to the opinions of leaders, authorities, superstars. By referring to them, the leader reinforces his arguments, thereby giving them greater credibility in the eyes of the object of manipulation (Hogan 2007). In Chinese society, which tends to be ethatist dominated (Dou 2014), reference to past and present political leaders is preferable.

"*Your guy*". For employees in Chinese organisations identifying with the group carries a positive charge (Arsenieva 2013), so it is important for Chinese managers to present themselves as one of them. Sun Tzu advises: "be like an innocent girl first – and the adversary will open the door for you" (Sun 2020), this is one way to gain favour. One of the common ways a Chinese leader interacts with his subordinates is that the director, for all his undeniable power and authority, should keep a patronizingly gentle and cordial attitude toward his subordinates, constantly apologizing and thanking them for their labors (Zeng 1981).

"*The common carriage*". This technique emphasises belonging to the same group, community, social class. Here there is a connection between the self and the group, for example by using the pronoun "us": "you and I want us to have more visitors, so that our establishment will bring people only pleasant experiences" (Nuridzhanov 2013). In Chinese, the use of 'inclusive we' (咱们, "you and I") to reinforce the connection with the object of influence instead of the 'exclusive we' (我们, "we") can serve as a marker of this manipulation practice. This practice can be applied in China primarily because the spirit of harmony and shared success is the first priority in Chinese organisations (Gao 1993).

*Multiplicity*. In this case the information from the supervisor comes quickly and in multiple directions, he presents information in a great flow and / or abruptly changes the direction of his decisions (Sheynov 2006). In the excessive flow of information from the manager, the employee does not have time to notice when the manager's arguments become weak or inappropriate, and may therefore agree with them and start to act as the manager wants. It is also called "Siege Wei in order to save Zhao" (Senger 2004) (according to one of the traditional stratagems), i.e. to change the direction of the offensive in an unexpected direction for the opponent. Some researchers also attribute this strategy to the peculiarities of the Chinese worldview, which tends towards a holistic perception of reality (Malyavin 2013).

*Taunting*. The Chinese do not like to be the object of taunting when it threatens to 'lose face'. The employee will therefore avoid possible ridicule and try to please the manager. Effectiveness of this technique lies in the fact that it affects the internal mental processes, acts on the subconscious (Mordachev 2007), by becoming an object of taunting, the worker also becomes vulnerable to external psychological influences. Unlike techniques when harsh and rough expressions are used openly, the humourous form of mockery is not accepted in bayonets by the object of manipulation due to its milder form of influence. Furthermore, in the leader-employee practice of communication in a Chinese organisation, ridicule is not allowed toward 1) politics, the political system of the PRC; 2) parents; 3) mentors (teachers); 4) food; 5) intimate relationships; 6) drug addiction; 7) law enforcement officials, etc (Kosinova 2013: 675-676).

*Compliment*. Praise has a pleasant effect on any stage of human interaction. A subtle and skillful compliment is a typical example of manipulative influence. Such manipulative techniques are used less frequently in managerial practice because the Chinese are generally more cautious about the use of compliments. In Chinese culture, compliments also could have a negative connotation (it could be considered as some way of bribery which is condemned). Therefore, managers are more likely to pay compliments to those who are older or have a higher social status (Ren 2019).

*Small concessions, favours*. This manipulative technique has a positive effect if used systematically (Grachev 2003). Letting employees leave work a little earlier, not punishing them financially for breaking dishes, forgiving tardiness, and other "favours" that the Chinese leader gives to his subordinates instead of severe direct punishment later serve as a condition for manipulation. By accepting such benevolent favours, the employee is put in the position of a 'debtor'. Reciprocity in relationships, the mutual exchange of "favours", including within hierarchical relationships, is one of the basic features of relationships in organisations (Malyavin 2007). Thus, the Chinese sociologist Jia Yuijiao believes that a manager's benevolent behaviour carries a significant resource due to the traditional significance of the concept of 'Ren', 'humanity' (仁, the researcher points out that the character is a compound of two simple signs: 'person' and 'two', i.e. 'two people', 'people together', 'connection between people') (Jia 2010). In doing so, strictly hierarchical Chinese, who develop tacit obedience, tend to become dependent on a 'kind', 'understanding' leader.

*Template phrases*. The use of such phrases in the manipulative practice of Chinese leaders is due to the fact that the object of influence does not think about the exact meaning of the phrase, does not perform logical operations to analyze it, but perceives it as a confirmation and amplification of the manipulator's statement (Albertych 2017). In Chinese practice, pattern phrases are not only slogans, proverbs and omens, stable expressions, but also lists of personality status characteristics: Mr., Madam, Engineer, Director, etc (Shardakov 2010).

*Implied choice*. This technique is used in a situation where a leader is waiting for a subordinate to make a decision or perform an action for the sake of manipulation (Pustovoitova2016). For example, a supervisor offers the object of influence "no alternative" options: "Either you clean the kitchen now or stay at work overnight" (Senger 2004).

*Dosage of background information*. In this case the background information is presented first in parts, e.g. when hiring, the manager orally describes all job responsibilities of his subordinates, indicating that they are all recorded in writing, but coincidentally the list could not be printed out before the negotiations (Grachov 2004). In general, dosed communication is highlighted as a significant feature of interactions with Chinese managers (Galeeva 2013). This practice comes from the symbolic communication inherent in the ritual, which requires "looking at the signs, to guess the essence." This approach allows the manager to hide information about which the employee should guess and speculate, but not directly ask (Malyavin 2013). Chinese businessmen explain this concept as follows: the art of managing people in Chinese-style is to make workers guess what the manager has in mind, this puts them in a position where they are forced to please their superiors (Redding 1996).

*Management of the discussion process*. Discussion process management refers to organisational manipulation techniques (Parshukov 2020). The choice of the place and time of any dialogue between the manager and the subordinates in the Chinese organisation is used as a kind of manipulation in which the head of the organisation wins (Leichenko 2007). When and under what circumstances the communication process will be structured has a direct impact on its success. In addition to the choice of time and place, the researchers identify other ways of managing the discussion process “with Chinese characteristics”: taking the initiative in defining the principles of negotiations, taking advantage of partners' weaknesses, imposing a sense of shame etc (Malyavin 2007).

*Referencing*. The manipulative practice of “*Referencing*” implies a repetition of the employee's position by the manager, which may be modified and transformed in the process of such a retelling (Ksheminsky 2016). As numerous sources show, in Chinese culture, only the superior can make decisions, so abstracting the positions of subordinates by their immediate supervisor is considered the steady norm (Palkin 2019). The technique of 'summarising' can also be applied to "*Referencing*", where the supervisor summarises the overall message, which also undergoes some changes and puts the emphasis in the right way.

*Annoying the interlocutor*. Annoyance is based on identifying weaknesses in a person (Manipulation 2021). The principle of 'Managing without acting' (achieving maximum results with minimum effort (Anikina, 2016)) implies restraint, which often results in the emotional irritation of the subordinate. One of the most common practices is delaying the resolution of important issues when it is unprofitable for the manager. In such a situation, the patient wins, while time is more often on the side of the one who is higher in status. Impatience, irritability, excessive demands are perceived as weakness and inability to achieve success in negotiations (Malyavin 2007).

*Self-glorification*. Self-glorification is used as the opposite of taunting and labelling (Semizdralova 2012). Examples are: "take my word for it", "I have been in the field for years", "first become an executive, then you can reason" etc. In actual managerial practice in China, this technique is not uncommon, despite the Chinese culture's professed desire for modesty. This practice is stimulated by another characteristic of the Chinese – the tendency towards hierarchical relationships (Laaksonen 1988) that leads to automatic recognition that the manager is smarter and more talented than the subordinate.

*The use of unfamiliar words, terms*. For China, the success of this practice is determined primarily by the "cult of the educated person": by definition, such a person has a higher status in society; when speaking to him, people with lower levels of education feel a suppressive effect and the use of terms and unfamiliar words contributes to it. Unfamiliar words always put people in an awkward situation, some people clarify their meaning, while others do not want to seem ignorant or pretend to know the meaning and nod their heads meaningfully (Malyukova 2011: 105-109). What is clear is that the technique psychologically affects the object of manipulation, and the feelings of shame, guilt, incompetence, and innocence make the object of manipulation more vulnerable.

*Avoiding unwanted discussions, disruption*. This manipulative technique of maneuvering during conversations with subordinates allows the supervisor to control the situation, steer it in the right direction and prevent it from developing in a way that the supervisor did not intend (Levin 2009). The supervisor may use this technique to resolve a conflict situation and not allow it to develop further. The phrase: 'that's it, we close the subject and get back to work' demonstrates mastery of the situation, authority and power. From the perspective of the Chinese ethnoconsciousness, it also demonstrates the ability to prevent emerging conflict – one of the most important qualities of a leader, which is highly valued by the Chinese, who generally tend to avoid open conflicts (Yu 2011: 121).

*Questioning manipulation*. Questioning sentences are typical of any discussion (Lyubimov 2013). Among manipulative questions we can distinguish the following types: 1. Question-repetition: Did you understand the task? Is there something that you do not understand in what I am saying? 2. Use of counter-questions: Tell me, will we have 13 wages? – What do you think? 3. Non-answerable question: Don't you learn from your mistakes? 4. Non-alternative question: You don't want to be gone tomorrow, do you? As researchers point out, question forms of sentences in the practice of supervisor-subordinate relations in Chinese organisations have significant features – limiting the topics of discussion, e.g. manager’s uncomfortable questions about employee’s personal life (Wang 2021).

*Comparison* is used in different spheres of life (Brusenskaya 2022). People are constantly being compared to others, with some being made an example of and others being criticised as a result of comparison. However, in Chinese society this is to a large extent a more stable form of upbringing than in Western culture. From childhood, the Chinese are compared with children in the playground, classmates, and older siblings, reflecting the importance of social ties and social status described above (Chu 2004). Comparison is an effective practice, because through it the Chinese identify themselves: from birth, the Chinese are involved in a network of interpersonal relationships that determines and organizes their existence, controls their consciousness (Sun 1993). Negative comparisons with another, more successful employee are a hint of 'Losing face' (丢脸, i.e. diminished credibility among colleagues and reduced opportunities to build the useful social connections). 'Losing face' is one of the most frightening prospects in a Chinese person's life, so the employee will do everything possible to avoid negative comparisons at work.

**Non-verbal Manipulative Techniques**

In addition to verbal and organisational (choice of venue and timing of the conversation) manipulative techniques, the non-verbal sphere (Pease 2006) should be singled out separately.Distinctive features of non-verbal manipulation are described by a number of Russian and foreign scholars (Stepanenko 2012). Some consider classifications of techniques, others study manipulation in the specific sphere of activity (Pavlova 2005: 359-383). The similarity of judgments is the high degree of importance of nonverbal communication and manipulation techniques. The authors of 'The Definitive Book of Body Language' (Pease 2006) note that 7% of any information is verbal (words and the meaning they convey), 38% is vocal (the timbre of the voice, the specifics of the pronunciation of the words, the articulation, volume), 55% is non-verbal. This study shows that the first impression of a person is formed in 4 minutes, interlocutors may not even have time to say a sentence or two in the meantime. During this time, body language transmits 60 to 80% of all information. It is noted that non-verbal behaviour can be divided into several systems: acoustic, optical, tactile-kinesthetic (touching), olfactory (smells) (Larina 2013: 26-30). Each of these systems employs different manipulative techniques which are divided into sections such as: kinesics (gestures, gesture movements), proxemics (distance between interlocutors), haptics (touch as manipulative influence), optics and acoustic influence.

**The empirical research of the manipulative practices of Chinese leaders**

The research was conducted in April-May 2022 and focused on assessing respondents' personality traits relevant to the contemporary Chinese leader. A total of 24 qualities were asked to be assessed, one of which was the ability to manipulate others. A total of 1,472 people between the ages of 18 and 66 from various Chinese provinces took part in the Internet survey. According to the data, a positive Chinese leader's role model should not have manipulative qualities when compared to other personality traits. Thus, of the 24 qualities of the role model leader, modesty (should be modest), authority (the role model should not be overbearing) and altruism (the leader should be collectivist) have a higher mean value than manipulative skills. This distribution indicates that, for respondents, a leader's manipulative abilities are not a characteristic that is typical for Chinese leader in an organisation (mean value = 3.42).

Recognition of the importance of manipulative qualities was significantly related to respondents' level of education: the higher the respondents' level of education, the more inherent it was in the ideal manager's role model. Attributing such qualities to oneself as important also increases with the level of education (mean value: have a high school education only – 2.3; studying at a higher education institution at present – 2.5; already have a university degree – 2.9).

Moreover, some indicative difference in the assessment of the role model for manipulation skills can be seen across professions. Managers, economists and military officers rate the quality of manipulation as a positive master role model higher than humanities, technical and medical professionals. The level of ability to manipulate is one of the characteristics that help contrast the positive and negative behavioral pattern of leaders (military, 4.0/2.7; economists, 3.5/2.7; managers, 3.5/2.7). For representatives of the three professions in question, the ability to manage people, including the use of manipulative techniques, was at the core of their work, indicating a link between manipulation and management. In contrast, those whom respondents considered to be poor managers were described as lacking in manipulation techniques.

Employees of large companies place a higher value on a manager's ability to manipulate others, compared to employees of small companies or those with no work experience at all. In large companies, manipulation is more evident than in small organisations. Also, those who work/worked in large companies are more likely to consider their own ability to manipulate to be an important quality than employees of small companies or those with no work experience.

The ability to manipulate others is rated as an important quality depending on whether management experience is present: if management experience is present, manipulation is rated 3.1 out of 5; if no management experience is present, manipulation is rated 2.3.

In another pilot study conducted in July 2021 among young Chinese entrepreneurs (age 21-30, tertiary education, total n = 50 young entrepreneurs), most respondents identified manipulation as a negative quality. However, 42 of the respondents indicated that manipulation practices could be used when the overall good of the organisation was being achieved, with 39 noting that manipulation had a negative impact on the nature of interactions in the workplace. We would like to emphasise that negative attitudes towards manipulative practices are expressed by young people who are going to work in a business environment in future (Deryugin 2020: 108).

**Conclusion**

The results of the study have shown that scientific and everyday understanding of the role of manipulative practices in the activities of managers of Chinese organisations differ significantly. In particular, the analysis of the scientific literature allows us to say that as Chinese society has developed, the understanding of the role of manipulation in management has transformed from complete non-recognition to recognition of the relevance of such technologies and even numerous special studies and developments of manipulative practices. We have seen that the understanding of the manipulative practices of the manager of Chinese organisations is seen in academic research as an advantage and a virtue of his or her managerial performance. In particular, researchers emphasise that such practices make management more flexible, adaptive and responsive to the characteristics of performers, carriers of a special Chinese culture.

The main advantage of using manipulative practices in the managerial activity of managers of Chinese organisations is their unique property of bypassing consciousness - the use of manipulation as a "soft power" providing expedient influence on employees. The main problem of manipulation was and still is the moral side of the question: for what interests and goals is this force used? In the conditions of post-industrial (digital) society, manipulation is becoming more and more active, and its capabilities and means are becoming more and more sophisticated. Manipulative practices of Chinese managers are able to increase the motivational component in the activities of performers and form a special type of social relations that are formed taking into account the personal characteristics of the manager and the employee of the organization. There is a notion that a competent manager should be able to manipulate his wards, use certain manipulation strategies and practice them in everyday interaction, relying on the knowledge of the specifics of Chinese morals and communication peculiarities. Books, articles, masterclasses and webinars teach how to master tactics of such influence, focusing on positive management results. On the contrary, at the everyday level among Chinese employees of organisations, a manipulative manager is often perceived as a deceiver, a liar who uses the best human qualities for his own benefit. There is an increasing amount of books and articles on how to avoid influence, how to fight manipulation and how not to "get hooked". For the object of influence - the "victim" - recommendations and techniques are developed on how to resist such manipulative influence on the part of the opposite sex, power structures, management etc.

Manipulative practices of Chinese managers from the point of view of sociology should be analysed as a special form of social interaction organised by managers as initiators of corporate relations, in conjunction with economic, psychological, technological and other means in the interests of promoting corporate culture, certain ideas, values, etc., sometimes in opposition to the interests, goals and values of employees. Often these are technologies of hidden influence on people. The study presents manipulative techniques of Chinese managers, which are of a habitual nature and have received their coverage (confirmation) not only massively in the practice of managerial work of Chinese managers, but also summarised and analysed in articles, publications and other materials.

The conducted empirical sociological research has confirmed a number of stated positions regarding manipulative practices of managers. In general, the ability of Chinese managers to manipulate is assessed by respondents as a negative quality. At the same time, the role of manipulative abilities is recognised as important for those respondents with a higher level of education: the higher the level of education, the more loyal the attitude to manipulative practices of executives. More loyal to manipulation are those respondents who themselves are included in the practice of private and public administration and have such experience (managers, economists, former military personnel). Respondents with education in humanities, medical and technical sciences perceive manipulative technologies more critically.. Those respondents who work in large companies are more likely to perceive the role of manipulative practices of Chinese managers positively.

As it becomes clear, to a large extent, the manipulative practices of the leaders of Chinese organisations constitute a specific social engineering, which is a tool for implementing the value worldviews of the leaders and to a significant extent determines the moral climate of Chinese organisations.

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