**Aalto University
School of Business**

Public Relations in China: An Exploration of Cultural Impact on Media Relations Practices, Case Company: Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, Beijing Office

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Public Relations in China: An Exploration of Cultural Impact on Media Relations, Case Company: Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, Beijing Office

Objective of the Study: The main purpose of this study was to explore the influence and impact that Chinese culture brings to the practice of media relations in Mainland China through the case company Ogilvy & Mather. Based on the research objective, the following research questions were formulated: (1) How is media relations carried out on a daily basis in Ogilvy & Mather? (2) What kind of relationship exists between the Chinese PR practitioners and the journalists? Has the Chinese culture impacted and shaped the relationship somehow in comparison to the Western countries (Nordic and the United States)? (3) Which aspects of the Chinese culture have influenced the practice of media relations, and how?

Methodology and the Theoretical Framework: The study was conducted with a qualitative approach. A three months internship and participant observation were conducted at the case company. The researcher worked closely with eight public relations practitioners in a public relations team serving a multinational IT client. Five interviewees, who the researchers believed to know the best about media relations and who were comfortable to discuss openly about it, were selected for semi-structured interviews. The theoretical framework was constructed based on the research questions and the literature review, and it consists of three components: (1) aspects of the Chinese culture that have an impact on public relations practices in China; (2) list of media relations practices; (3) outcomes of media relations practices that appear to be different from the original practices deriving from the United States.

Findings and Conclusions: The study revealed that *Guanxi, Renqing, Hongbao* culture, Confucianism, Hall's cultural context and Hofstede's cultural dimensions all had an impact on the media relations practices in Mainland China. The findings confirmed the previous research that the relationship between the Chinese PR practitioners and journalists were collaborative and mutual, whereas it was more adversarial in the United States and in the Nordic countries. In addition, the practice of media allowance and soft articles were discovered. These two practices were ethically debatable and rather implicit, thus, they were somewhat neglected by previous researchers. Lastly, the study found that the practice of *guanxi* and media allowance in media relations did not have unethical intentions. PR practitioners were merely trying to follow the social norms under the cultural context.

Keywords: International Business Communication, media relations practices, public relations (PR), Mainland China, Chinese culture, Ogilvy & Mather

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Master's thesis aims to investigate the influence and impact that Chinese culture brings to the practice of media relations in Mainland China. Firstly, industry background information including historical development of public relations in China will be briefly introduced. Secondly, the research gap will be discussed. Thirdly, the research problem and research questions will be presented. Finally, the structure of this thesis will be put forth and elaborated.

1.1 Industry Background and Motivations

In China, public relations is a rather new concept that is being institutionalized and getting increasing attention from businesses and government (Ke & Yu, 2009; He & Xie 2009, p. 1), whereas media relations is an important component of public relations, especially in China (Zhang, Shen & Jiang, 2009, p. 228). Therefore, this topic, which examines public relations practices in China and explores the cultural impact on media relations, is undoubtedly important and current for the academic society and the business world.

He and Xie (2009, p. 1) argue that public relations in China started from copying foreign public relations theories and practices. Public relations was already an emerging concept attracting attention from many practitioners in the United States starting more than thirty years ago (Argenti, 2008). According to Chen and Li (2010, p. 18), the concept of public relations was passed from USA to Britain in as early as year 1920, and later passed to Canada and France in 1940 and 1946 respectively. The concept of public relations spread to Hong Kong and Taiwan around the 1960s, and it emerged in Mainland China only later in 1983 when the first formal public relations agency was established, and within the same year Shenzhen University created a major in public relations (p. 19).

Note however, Black (1992, p. 42) contests that the concept of public relations was first brought to China through contacts with foreign joint venture partners in September 1981 that is two years earlier than what Chen and Li (2010) put forth in their book. China's economic reform during the early 1980s attracted famous PR agencies around the world to enter the country for huge business opportunities. The first two foreign PR agencies that entered the Chinese market were Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller in 1984 and 1985 respectively, followed by Edelman, Ogilvy and Fleishman Link Consulting from year 1992 onwards (He & Xie 2009, p. 3). It is undisputable that public relations is a fairly new concept in China compared to Western countries as acknowledged by numerous scholars such as Zhou (2010); Li and Liu (2006); Chen and Li (2010); Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 42); and Hackley and Dong (2001, p. 16).

According to the statistics presented by the Survey Report on Chinese Public Relations Industry in 2007 cited in He and Xie (2009, p. 3), the public relations market in Mainland China is experiencing a rapid growth with annual turnover of over 10.8 billion RMB (approximately 1.2 billion Euro), which is 2.8 billion more than its previous year. Even though the potential of the PR market in China is huge, public relations, especially its practices, has somewhat developed its own way, and differ from the practices in the Western countries (Ritchey, 2000; Zhang, et al., 2009). Exploring these differences in the light of Chinese culture is one of the main research motivations of this thesis since it is both meaningful and challenging. In addition, personal interest and knowledge in public relations and Chinese culture adds passion and an edge to the research work.

1.2 Research Gap

This section will indicate the research gap and the centrality of this study. As the previous section denotes, the concept of public relations was passed to China about twenty years ago, while it has existed in some of the Western countries for more than ninety years. Due to its young age and its fast evolvement, China, just like many other regions in the world, lacks empirical research and scholarship in the study of its public relations practices. Sarusup and

Kim (2004) in their article, which investigates public relations in South Korea, urge the exploration of public relations in regions where research regarding to its practices are limited. The authors point out that there is a greater need for international public relations theories and frameworks due to globalization and differences among the social, cultural and political systems across nations. This is consistent with Sriramesh (2009, p 52), who encourages the study of public relations in different regions of the world due to the lack of public relations literature and scholarship on public relations practices outside America and Europe.

The focus of this thesis is to explore the research gap described above, which is to examine the impact that Chinese culture sets on media relations in Mainland China. Figure 1 is drawn to illustrate this focus.
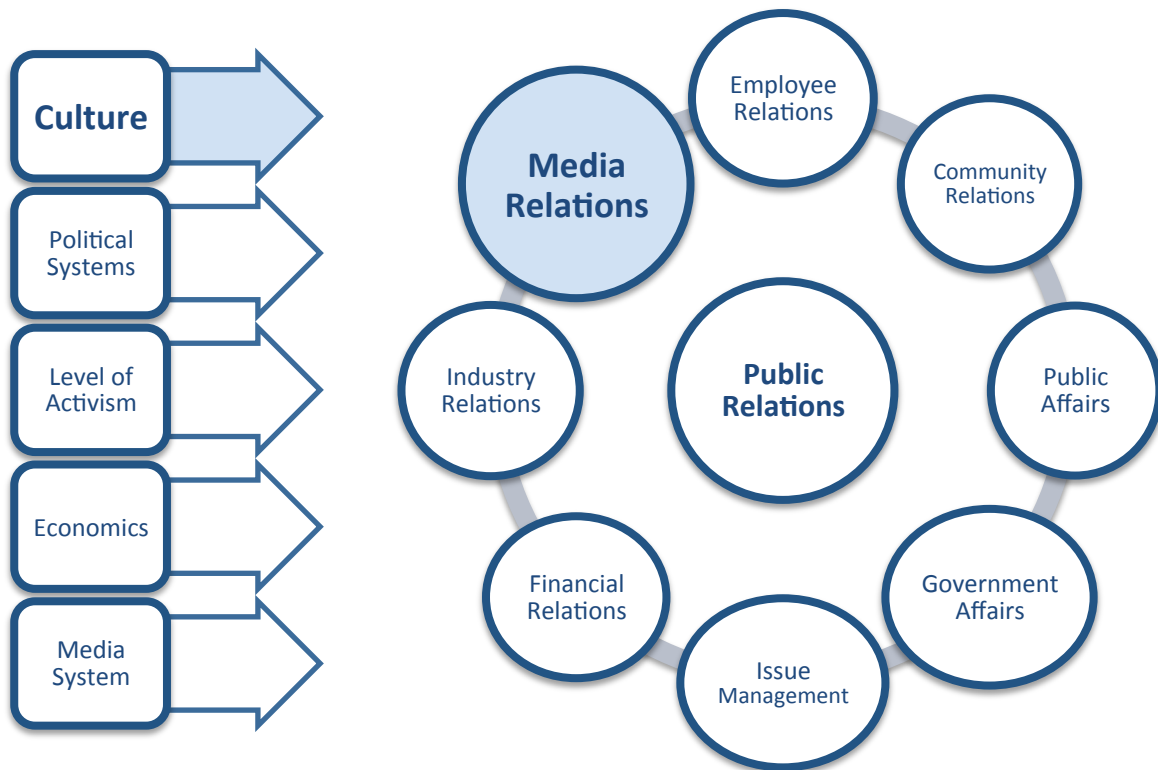
Figure 1. Contextual Variables and Components of Public Relations

On the left side of Figure 1 are five contextual variables that influence global public relations practices in a given country or region (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). Existing studies regarding public relations in the international field have often examined an aspect of public relations in a region against one or more contextual variables. The above five contextual variables have been affirmed by various scholars and used to study PR practices in different countries (Braun, 2007, p 1; Zhang et al., 2009, p 227; Sarusup & Kim, 2004). One of the variables, culture, is undoubtedly an influential factor that impacts the practice of public relations in a given country since public relations involves communications and relationship building. As Sarusup and Kim (2004, p. 293) set forth, culture is embedded in every aspect of a nation, from interpersonal communication to its political system, which influences the practice of public relations.

On the right side of Figure 1 are the different functions of public relations. Different scholars and public relations professionals are likely to label and group these functions differently (Argenti 2008; Cutlip, Centre & Broom, 1999; Zhao 1999), since there is no definite or correct answer when it comes to naming the exact functions of public relations. The functions could be labeled with different names, such as issue management could be labeled as crisis communication, and government affairs could be labeled as political and government relations. Therefore, on the right side of Figure 1, the circles surrounding public relations are the possible functions that many scholars and public relations practitioners might place under public relations.

Among these public relations functions, media relations is an important component of public relations without argument, and especially in the context of public relations practices in China. The importance of media relations could be concluded from Chen and Culbertson (2003) and Wu (2004), who all put forth that the performance of public relations agencies can be evaluated on the basis of media coverage they generate for their clients. Sarusup and Kim (2004, p. 292) in their journal article even raise the question that, why is public relations simply perceived as media relations in some countries. Moreover, Jiang (2007, p.

11) points out in her conference paper that PR agencies in China are extremely media relations oriented. Corporate communications managers might hire a PR agency with the sole purpose of locating journalists who can get press releases out quickly in order to promote corporate image and brand awareness among target audiences. Therefore, exploring cultural impact on media relations is ideal since participant observation and interviews are conducted within a PR agency in China. In addition, Jiang (2007, p. 25) encourages the further study of media relations in China and communications with the media. Next, the research problem and questions will be formulated based on the research gap and niche being discussed in this section.

1.3 Research Problem and Questions

This section will elaborate and explain the thesis research problem and research questions. The research problem could be summarized as "How does Chinese culture impact media relations, and consequently, public relations?" The aim of this thesis is to explore the possible effects of Chinese culture on media relations practices through the case company Ogilvy. Therefore, the first research question will ask to examine the daily media relations practices in Ogilvy. The second research question will ask to investigate the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists since networking and relationship building are important components of daily media relations practices. Finally, he third research questions will ask to define the aspects of culture influential to media relations and the possible outcomes. The three research questions are listed below:

1. How is media relations carried out on a daily basis in Ogilvy & Mather?

2. What kind of relationship exists between the Chinese PR practitioners and the journalists? Has the Chinese culture impacted and shaped the relationship somehow in comparison to the Western countries (Nordic and the United States)?

3. Which aspects of the Chinese culture have influenced the practice of media relations, and how?

The generalizability of the second and third research questions is not limited to the case company Ogilvy. This is because the researcher believes that unlike the first research question, the findings for the latter two questions, to some extent, are applicable and generalizable within the context of Mainland China. This is due to the fact that relationships in media relations and cultural influences on the practices should be similar throughout the entire industry, which are unlikely to be affected by the agency where the PR practitioner works. The first question, on the other hand, which addresses the practice of media relations, may vary from agency to agency due to differences in the way of doing things. In any case, Ogilvy is a well-known PR agency and a good representative of the collective PR agencies. More about the limitations on transferability will be discussed under Chapter 3 and Chapter 6.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The introductory chapter of this thesis has presented the industry background, research gap and research questions. The second chapter of this thesis will explore previous research in the field with three aims in mind. The first aim is to clarify the concepts and definitions of public relations and media relations. The second aim is to examine the practice of media relations in the United States and in the Nordic countries against the practices in Mainland China, as well as to explore the relationships between PR practitioners and journalists. The third aim is to investigate the cultural influences identified by previous researchers concerning the practice of media relations in China.

The third chapter of this thesis will explain and describe the chosen research methodologies. In addition, it will discuss the trustworthiness of the study. Qualitative research methodology will be adopted for this thesis, which includes participant observation and interview. Observation will be in the form of a three months internship with a public relations team in Ogilvy. It will allow close inspections of the daily PR practices, and is also likely to identify practices and elements that PR practitioners might have taken for granted. It is a research methodology that has not yet being employed by previous

researchers in the study of public relations in China. Therefore, it is likely to generate new insights. The semi-structured interview will act as triangulation and an opportunity to generate further insights on top of the observation, and vice versa.

The fourth chapter is going to discuss the data collection and data analysis with the aim to ensure validity and reliability of the study. It will give some introduction to the participants' background, the interview background, and to the agency where the participant observation takes place. It is going to state how the participant observation and the interview are actually conducted and carried out, as well as how the data is recorded and analyzed using Kvale (1996)'s seven stages of an interview investigation and the seven phased analytic procedure proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2011).

The fifth chapter of this thesis will present and discuss the findings from observation and interview. In the Asian culture, hidden practices seem to commonly exist, which is also believed to be the case in the Chinese PR industry. Two of the implicit practices in media relations, media allowance and soft article, which were hidden from or neglected by previous researchers, are revealed and expounded. Moreover, the chapter on findings and discussion will justify and discuss media relations practices in the light of Chinese culture.

The sixth and the last chapter will summarize the main findings and provide concrete answers to the research problem and questions. It will point out the significance and implications of this study, as well as bringing into view the limitations. It will also suggest topics for future research and provide a few recommendations on how to perform an even better research based on the experiences gained from composing this thesis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review aims to build a theoretical framework with regard to existing literature that examine public relations, media relations and the possible influences of Chinese culture. Firstly, the concept and definition of public relations, media relations and culture will be clarified. These three terms are the core concepts of this study, and will appear throughout the thesis. Secondly, the practice of media relations will be described and discussed. Thirdly, the relationship between PR practitioners and the media will be uncovered and examined. Lastly, aspects of culture that may influence the practice of public relations and media relations in China will be pinned down and their impact will be investigated.

The terms PR practitioner, PR professional, PR agent and PR people, are used interchangeably in this thesis to make variation for the reading. They do represent the same group of people, that is, the professionals who practice public relations. Different researchers and scholars tend to call PR practitioners differently, the above names are legitimate, and can be found used in literatures cited in this thesis.

2.1 The Definitions of Public Relations, Media Relations and Culture

This section will define public relations, media relations and culture. Public relations and media relations will be defined by examining the literature references in both English and Chinese. The literature in Chinese is written by Chinese authors targeting Chinese audiences and consequently published in China. It is examined alongside the English literature to validate that public relations and media relations are defined the same way in China as in Western countries. Understanding the concept of public relations will allow a better comprehension of the role that media relations plays in accomplishing its objective.

Both Cutlip, et al., (1999) and Argenti (2008) point out that public relations is an important management function and a two-way communication, which builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its public. Huang (1997) puts forth,

the goal of public relations is to facilitate mutual understanding and resolve conflicts between an organization and the public. In 1982, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), in its national assembly, adopted a short definition of public relations that remains popular today. Instead of using the words "build and maintain relationship" and "mutual understanding", the PRSA used different words but which can be interpreted to have similar meanings. PRSA (2013, p.1) defines public relations as it "*helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.*" This phrase can also be understood as helping organizations and their publics to form a positive relationship with each other through mutual understanding.

The British Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) concurs with PRSA, but adds a few more aspects to its definition. "*Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.*" CIPR (2013, p.1) In addition to mutual understanding as presented above, CIPR adds that public relations also influences audiences' opinions and behaviors. Cutlip, et al., (1999) share the same view with CIPR that public relations deals with and influences the opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the public. Furthermore, Moore and Kalupa (1985) argue that individuals with different attitudes form the public, whereas, the objective of public relations is to measure, analyze and influence the public opinion. Therefore, it can be inferred that in addition to building and maintaining relationships and mutual understanding, public relations also influences opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the public.

Chinese sources are consistent with the Western literature references. Li and Liu (2006, p. 32) and Zhou (2010, p. 18) also convey that public relations is long term and mutual, which helps an organization to build a relationship with its audience as well as to influence their views and attitudes. It is worth to note that many Chinese sources on public relations define and describe the concept in accordance to the Western references. One of the main reasons

is that the concept of public relations originates from the United States, thus it is much more maturely developed over there than in China (Jin, 1999; Li & Liu, 2006).

After cross checking and comparing the Western references with Chinese sources on public relations, it could be concluded that the Chinese have adopted similar if not exactly the same definitions of public relations as practitioners and scholars in North America and Europe. This conclusion concurs with the finding of a Western scholar Sam Black who has visited China for several times to study public relations in the country (Black, 1992, p. 42). However, similar definitions of public relations do not necessarily mean that the practices of public relations are also the same. As Scott Kronick, managing director of Ogilvy and Mather Public Relations in Beijing, during an interview with Ritchey (2000, p. 29), points out the difference between public relations in China and in the United States is indeed in their practices. This somewhat prophesies that interesting findings are likely to emerge from exploring the practices of media relations in China.

The following definition of public relations can be summarized from the literature review: "*Public relations helps organizations to build and maintain relationships and foster mutual understandings with their public, as well as to influence their opinions, attitudes and behaviors*." It would be worth to note that the word "public" in the above sentence does not necessarily mean the general public, but rather the target audience. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that there are various definitions for the term public relations. For example, PRSA proposes that public relations brings private and public policies into harmony. While Kreps (1986) sets forth that public relations manages the communication between the organization and its publics. Furthermore, public relations professionals help organizations to adjust and adapt to changes in their environment (Cutlip, et al., 1999).

As could be observed, the definition of public relations also incorporates its objective. Along with this objective, the role of media relations in public relations becomes clearer. Well-managed media relations will provide excellent channels allowing an organization to

build and maintain a favorable relationship with its public, as well as to influence their opinions, attitudes and behaviors. The definition of media relations is rather straightforward and is not as complex as the concept of public relations. The word media relations is self-explanatory, it simply refers to a business, an organization or a PR professionals' mutually dependent relationship with professional journalists or media outlets. After clarifying the concept and objectives of public relations and media relations, the last term to be defined is culture.

Culture is term that everybody knows, but finds difficult to define. In fact, there is no unanimity of the definition of culture. The term has at least 164 definitions in anthropological literature (Kroeber and Kluckhohn cited in Chen & Culbertson, 2003, p. 24). Culture embodies beliefs and values, which shape behaviors and thoughts of the people. Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 24) propose that cultural beliefs tend to be evident, leading people to take them for granted. Braun (2007, p. 202) underlines, culture affects what is acceptable behavior in the public relations context such as the meaning of gift-giving in the course of business, which is a common practice in China. Wu (2011, p. 12) cites Sriramesh's (2003) and Shin and Cameron's (2003b) proposition that media relations is shaped by the cultural elements of a society. In a nutshell, culture impacts the behavior and thoughts of the people, which in turn, influences the practices of media relations as well. Now that the definitions of public relations, media relation and culture have been explained and their relationships with each other have been described, the next section will go on to explore the daily practices of media relations.

2.2 The Practice of Media Relations

This section highlights the practice of media relations and its role in public relations. Due to the lack of research regarding the practice of media relations in Mainland China, this section will cross-examine the practices in both China and the Western countries to generate more comparable data. The first subsection lays a basis that can be used later to build up the answer for the first research question. It is also a part of the theoretical

framework (Figure 5), which depicts the daily media relations practices. The second subsection examines the ethical dilemmas in the Chinese PR and media industry, as a result from the high context culture.

2.2.1 Disseminating information through the media

The previous section has clarified the objective of public relations, which is to build and maintain good relationships with the public and to influence their opinions, attitudes and behaviors. The media act as the medium for PR practitioners to achieve this objective. Hence, news agencies and media outlets are prominent for PR practitioners. This subsection will first briefly explain the importance of media relations and its objective. Then it will describe its daily practices including some tactics and methods adopted by the PR practitioners when interacting with the media. Last, it will discuss the preferred communications medium between PR practitioners and journalists. This subsection is relevant for answering the first research question regarding the daily practices of media relations in Ogilvy since it sets a good framework for comparison. The daily media relations practices listed in the theoretical framework (Fig. 5) is also constructed on the basis of this subsection.

According to Larsson (2009, p. 133), the media has become increasingly important for an organization's external communication. Larsson points out three reasons to indicate why the news media are crucial for public relations and why journalists are prioritized targets for PR professionals (p. 134). Firstly, the influence and impact potential of the news media is unlimited, which makes it ideal for creating a desired corporate image and shaping the public opinion in a favorable way. Secondly, an article written by a journalist and published in the news media would have a higher level of credibility compared to any other communication channels. Thirdly, media publicity is a more cost-effective method than paid advertising.

It is proposed by Henderson (2006) and Seitel (2006) that it is public relations' responsibility to create and maintain a positive image and reputation of a company, which is to expose an organization positively to its publics through topics of public interest. Chen et al., (2012, p. 697) indicate that managing media relations is as important to Chinese PR practitioners as to their Western counterparts. Part of the Chinese PR practitioners' work is to aid their clients to obtain more exposure, higher recognition and better reputation by supplying journalists and news reporters with press releases in addition to other news worthy materials. Meanwhile, in Nordic countries, such as Sweden, the everyday work of PR practitioners includes networking, relationship building, news production and getting activities published in the media (Larsson, 2009, p. 131).

One of the methods to generate positive media coverage for an organization is through issuing press releases and press kits alongside with brochures, newsletters and annual reports. A press kit, also known as a media kit is a folder that consists of information that is often promotional about an organization and its businesses (Cutlip, et al., 1999). It sometimes also includes information about an event and a person depending on the situation. The materials in a press kit could include fact sheet, press release, brochure, media clips and photographs with caption. The press kit enables fast dissemination of information to various media, especially during crisis situations.

In addition to disseminate information through the media, public relations practitioners frequently act as media relations counsels as well. Li, Cropp, Sims and Jin (2012) put forth in their journal article that one of the critical roles among the four dimensions of PR roles is acting as a media relations counsel. The practices of a media relations counsel include: crisis management; conduct research and evaluations in response to crisis or conflicts; to handle media enquires during both ordinary and difficult times; to provide media training to staffs; and organize press conferences when needed.

The above elaborates the objective of media relations as well as depicts an overall picture of the media relations practices as listed in the theoretical framework (Fig. 5). The next three paragraphs will look at how PR practitioners interact tactically with the appropriate media to further understand the practices of media relations. Chen, et al., (2012, p. 702) reveal that depending on the different variables, such as time, issue and media outlet, public relations professionals often choose to interact selectively with the media, and largely at tactical levels. This is in accordance with Jiang's (2007, p. 21) reporting, where a public relations manager confirms in the interview that in-house PR practitioners should be more selective when using media for information dissemination. Outreach and efficiency in terms of message delivery should be assessed when using new media. While adapting to the constantly changing media environment and being tactically selective of the media, PR practitioners should be actively communicating to them as well. That is, to keep media updated, know their needs and offer them what they are interested in.

The proposition to interact selectively with the media is consistent with Larsson (2009, p. 133), who reports that the media is not equally important to PR practitioners. The author describes the order of importance as following. The most important media are some of the largest radio and television stations as well as large national newspapers. Among the television programs, news program is the most sought after, followed by talk shows and entertainment. Between the print media, the editorial and debate sections of daily morning newspapers are the most wanted for PR practitioners. On the other hand, when it comes to certain activities and events, specialized media and regional media will become primary targets for PR practitioners (p. 134). For example, trade magazines and other specialized presses are important media for product promotions and launches, whereas regional and local media are excellent communication channels for opinion-generating campaigns.

When approaching the media outlets and journalists, Scott (2007) suggests that pitching the right story to the right media using a neutral tone is essential. Harris and Whalen (2006) cited by Murray (2009, p. 25) put forth steps to spot influential journalists and bloggers.

The first step is to find out who would be interested in the product or the issue. This confirms Larsson (2009, p. 138)'s view for PR professionals to make connections with the right journalists, and further explains how PR practitioner should interact selectively with the media. Often a media analysis is conducted to discover the type of questions and issues that different journalists write about in order to determine the topics and particular industries each journalist covers. The second step proposed by Harris and Whalen (2006) is to attract the targeted journalists by giving them incentives or invite them to events. After the initial contact, the PR practitioner could then collect their information to find out the leaders among them, and involve them in future events. A PR practitioner points out that maintaining a relationship with journalists is a long-term and ongoing process, so that the journalists know where the PR practitioner stands, and trust him or her to present conclusive information (Larsson, 2009, p. 138).

Murray (2009, pp. 29-30) also emphasizes that communications between PR practitioners and journalists should be two-way in order to form trust between the two parties. For example, frequent interactions such as inviting journalists and bloggers to events, as well as constructive commenting on bloggers' posts all help to foster mutual trust. Instilling trust is not only important between the organization and its publics but also between public relations professionals and the media (Jin, 1999; Murray, 2009). The importance of two-way communications and instilling trust with the media has also being acknowledged by the Chinese PR practitioners. Both Jiang (2007) and Chen, et al., (2012) stress the significance of two-way communications and sophisticated interactions with the media. One example of sophisticated public relations is to cultivate journalists' receptivity to the organization that the PR professional represents, rather than impose ideas on them (Jiang, 2007, p. 20). PR agents would keep journalists informed of the concepts, solutions and customer references to company's products and services. Consequently, when the journalists foresee to write newsworthy stories, they would turn to PR agents for useful materials and information. This way, PR practitioners are actually able to obtain better media coverage.

Apart from the various similarities in Western and Chinese media relations, there is one obvious difference, that is the choice of communications medium. In the Nordic countries, the communication medium between the journalists and PR professionals mostly consists of phone calls and e-mail exchanges, where the latter form of online communication has become more popular during the recent years (Larsson, 2009). Wu (2011, p. 13) explains that journalists in low context cultures, such as the United States, prefer written communications and online communications through email, whereas journalists in high context cultures, such as in East Asia, prefer off-line communications, such as phone calls and face-to-face. This is because in the Asian cultures, implicit communication is more effective than explicit communication. This means body language, facial expression along with tone and pace of the voice all have significant affect on communications in a high context culture.

In summary, this subsection has mainly identified the similarities in media relations practices between the United States, the Nordic countries and Mainland China, with the only exception being the choice of communications medium. The objective, functions and practices of media relations appear to resemble one another, as well as some of the mindsets and tactics adopted by PR practitioners when interacting with the media seem to be similar. It could be concluded that the concept of media relations in the Western countries and in Mainland China are still closely related. The next subsection of the literature review will show that among the similarities, there are some significant differences, which leads to ethical dilemmas, as a result from the Chinese culture.

2.2.2   Ethical dilemmas deriving from high context culture

This subsection discusses some of the media relations practices that could be viewed as unethical in the Western countries but taking place on a frequent basis in China. These include media's reliance on information subsidy and acceptance of monetary benefits from the PR practitioners. Information subsidy in public relations and journalism refers to the information sources that are provided and sent to the news media through various mediums

such as press releases, and sometimes even the purchase for advertising. This subsection describes the localization of some media relations practices that is likely to be caused by the high context culture of the Chinese society. Figure 2 is a part the theoretical framework (Fig. 5), which explains the subject of this subsection and its relevance to the third research question that is how an aspect of culture influences media relations.
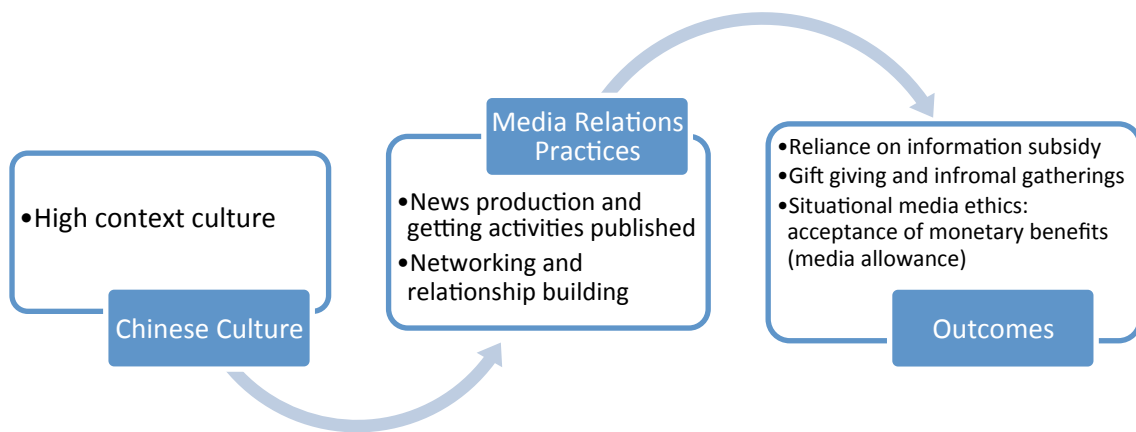
Figure 2. High Context Culture Leading to Ethical Dilemmas

Firstly, the ethical dilemmas, which are the outcomes in Figure 2 will be explained and described. There is indeed a disturbing contrast in Chinese public relations, while on one hand there is an urge for professional ethics, on the other hand there seems to be little action done about it. Li et al., (2012, p. 707) allege, *"Professional ethics codes were also viewed [by PR professionals] as something to be not just aware of but also carried out on a daily basis"*. Yet, the irony is that none of the reviewed literature has described this professional ethics code, which arouses the question if there is any and what they are. In addition, many PR professionals are aware of the immaturity of the media and lack of media ethics, but they still seem to play in accord with these rules and none of the interview participants has clear stated that he or she is no part of such practices (Wu, 2004; Jiang, 2007; Zhang, et al., 2009).

According to media ethics in America, journalists should be impartial and serving public's interests (PRSA, 2012). According to Wu (2011, p. 13), there are absolute standards in the United States regarding media ethics since rules and regulations are more important in low context cultures. Giving journalists gifts can be considered as bribery that is unethical conduct because U.S. journalists resent the thought of being bought by public relations practitioners. In addition, entertainments with journalists and paying for their travel expenses are also considered to be unethical in the United States. PRSA (2012, p. 2) has a code of ethics for its members, which states that journalists should *"Preserve the free flow of unprejudiced information when giving or receiving gifts by ensuring that gifts are nominal, legal, and infrequent"*. This indicates that journalists cannot take gifts from public relations practitioners in order to release favorable media coverage for their organization, product or issue of any kind.

Wu (2011, p. 12) proposes that due to cultural differences between East Asia and the United States, media ethics, such as gift giving and informal gatherings, are significantly different. Engaging in social activities and giving gifts to journalists is a common cultural practice in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. It is a way to build closer relationships and as a courtesy. Gift giving and sometimes the exchange of monetary benefits for press coverage take place relatively frequently in these regions. According to Wu (2011, pp. 9-10), Taiwanese journalists are receptive to freebies such as gifts, meals and trips from sources. Even though journalists' acceptance of cash is considered as unethical in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, these practices still exists. A number of Taiwanese interviewees saw their colleagues accepting cash and monetary benefits from sources. Wu (2011, pp. 12-13) categorizes the acceptance of cash to be part of the situational nature of media ethics in Asian cultures. She remarks that media ethics appear to be different in Asian cultures and in the United States due to the fact that gift giving and informal gatherings are culturally acceptable in the former cultures whereas often viewed as bribery by journalists in the U.S.

Similar ethical dilemmas also exist in Mainland China, where information subsidy and media allowance are common practices. Chen, Chen and Chen (2012) deduce from their research that information subsidy has become a popular phenomenon in China. It lightens the journalists' workload of information collection and shortens the time to publication. On the downside, however, the source often lacks objectivity and may serve a partial interest that plays against media ethics. It has become more popular and receptive for Chinese journalists to obtain and rely on the information supplied by PR practitioners, especially when it comes to complex issues involving science, medicine, education, and social welfare (Chen et al., 2012, p. 697). As a result, PR practitioners play an increasingly essential part in shaping news coverage in China. On the other hand, transportation allowance, also called media allowance, is paid to the journalist for reporting an article, and the amount determines the words that get printed (Jiang, 2007, p. 19). According to an interviewee, the reason why everybody is doing it is because it is socially acceptable and nobody wants to violate the common rule (p. 19).

The texts below summarize three ways for organizations to gain press coverage in China, which are all ethically debatable and have been advocated against, yet, they still exist (Chen & Culbertson, 2003, pp. 37-38). The texts are adapted and rephrased referenced from Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 37) who cite Pan (2000).

1. It is common for newspapers to seek financial sponsorship from the source for editing a special section or writing an in-depth story to cover travel and other expenses. From time to time, the sponsor may give cash in the form of "red packets" also called "Hongbao". Although many news agencies and government officials now prohibits this practice, this phenomenon still exists.
2. Due to the fact that an editor sometimes receives a commission of 10% to 20% from advertising and sponsorship revenue that his or her section brings to a newspaper or magazine, this in turn encourages the editor to attract more advertisements and report in-depth stories of organizations who are willing to provide sponsorship.

3. Newspapers frequently allow external parties to edit and produce a special insert or section that usually proves to be the writing of public relations professionals of the sponsoring organization.

Wu (2011) believes Hall's cultural context, developed in year 1976, can partly explain the differences in media relations. It is a known fact that China along with other East Asian cultures belongs to the high context and implicit culture. According to Victor (1992), in a high context culture, information and meaning are inferred from the context of a message rather than said explicitly. People in high context cultures prefer indirect approaches and implicit communication. Furthermore, Victor (1992) indicates in his study that laws and regulations in high context cultures are less likely to be followed in comparison to low context cultures. Rules and contracts are less honored in high context cultures where personal relationships and situational factors often come first. These are in accordance with the findings by Wu (2011), which reveal that rules and regulations are not absolute in Asian cultures. The author brings forth that the nature of rules are situational in high context cultures, which may also explain the situational nature of media ethics (p. 13). As mentioned earlier, Taiwanese journalists are aware that accepting cash from PR people is unethical, however, many still saw their peers taking gifts and cash.

To conclude, the high context aspect of the Chinese culture influences the daily news production and obtainment of press coverage, as well as networking and relationship building. Due to the situational nature of media ethics, the media are more reliant on the information supplied by the PR people, and may accept monetary payments in exchange for media coverage while knowing that this conduct may violate code of conduct. Moreover, gift giving and informal gatherings are cultural acceptable behaviors under the high context culture while they are often considered to be inappropriate in low context cultures. The implicit or under-the-table media relations practices make it hard for researchers, as outsiders, to unveil and dig deeper beneath the surface. Consequently, literature regarding the Chinese cultural specific media relations practices appear to be rather general and

limited. On the bright side, this research gap provides the opportunity for this thesis research to uncover and explore further outcomes that Chinese culture may bring to media relations. The next section will explore the concept of *guanxi* and its influence on networking and relationship building.

2.3 The Relationship Between a PR Practitioner and the Media

Building a healthy relationship with the media is crucial to the success of PR practitioners (Larsson, 2009; Henderson, 2008; Scott, 2007). Larsson (2009, p. 127) proposes that it is important to establish and maintain a good relationship with relevant editorial staff. As the previous section reveals, one of the daily responsibilities of a PR practitioner is to network and build relationships with the media. The literature under this section suggest that the Chinese *guanxi* deeply influences the networking and relationship building in media relations, consequently, the relationships between PR practitioners and journalists are closer and more collaborative in China compared to their Western counterparts. Gift giving and informal gatherings are a part of the *guanxi* practice, whereas reliance on information subsidy is likely to be resulted from the collaborative relationships between parties. Figure 3 illustrates how *guanxi* affects networking and relationship building in media relations.
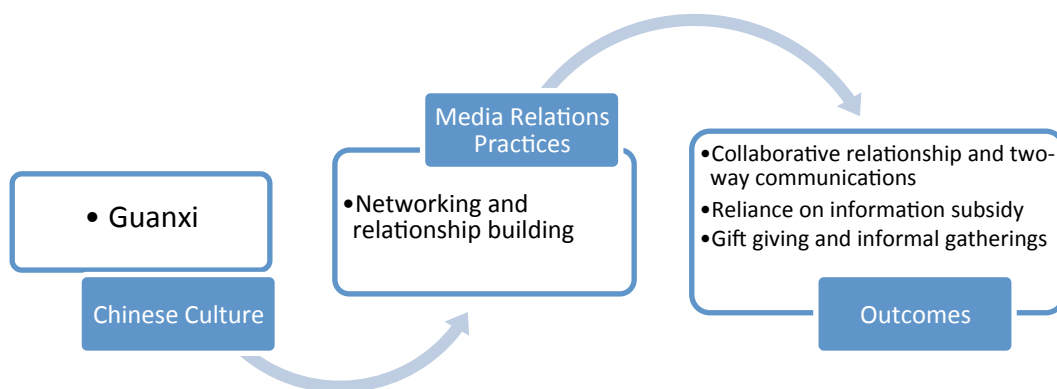
Figure 3. The Influence of Guanxi on Networking and Relationship Building

Overall, Figure 3 and this section is a part of the theoretical framework (Fig. 5) and answer the second research question, which asks about the relationships between PR practitioners and journalists. This section will first discuss the uneasy alliance between PR practitioners and journalists in the Western countries. Then, it will closely investigate the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists in China, which is influenced by *guanxi*.

2.3.1   The uneasy alliance in the West

PR professionals tend to establish close relationships with journalists in order to fulfill mutual needs (Larsson, 2009, p. 132). The contacts are mostly initiated by PR professionals, targeting more frequently at news editors and journalists at newspapers with specialized beats (p. 137). However, the relationship between the PR practitioners and the journalists in the Western countries seems to be an uneasy alliance rather than being collaborative and friendly. According to the interviews conducted by Larsson (2009, pp. 135-136), most PR professionals have respect for journalism and the media's role in the society but hardly any of the interviewed journalists expressed the corresponding attitude and respect for the PR agents.

Larsson's (2009) findings conclude that the PR agents are definitely mistaken to believe that they have well-functioning relations with journalists and the news desks since most of the journalists thought of their relationships with the PR agents in a negative light. A journalist of a national newspaper called PR agents as his "*most important opponents*" who have become "*unbelievably much more clever with what they do*" (p. 136). This clearly indicates that the journalist sees PR professionals as tricky opponents rather than alliances who share the same goals. Some journalists, to an extreme extent, even claim to have no connection to the PR people at all, and that they reject or avoid such contact (p. 137). A majority of journalists in the interview consider their relations with the PR practitioners to be neutral, and as a part of the job or rather a role-play, yet nothing close to what PR professionals have optimistically described as "*a great relationship*" (p. 137).

Only a few journalists positively and appreciatively think of their relationships with the PR agents, asserting that PR agents are assistance to them in contrary to the normative framework that depicts them as opponents (Larsson, 2009, p. 143). An editor of a trade magazine comments that he/she gets great ideas from PR consultants. Apart from the distinctive few, the majorities are less enthusiastic about this relationship. A television reporter describes that it is sometimes scary how PR professionals make their job easier by supplying ready-made reports, reducing their time on investigation in an unhealthily addictive way.

Wu (2011, pp. 10-11) explains that the uneasy alliance between PR practitioners and the journalists is due to the misinterpretation of the definition of public relations, and this phenomenon has lasted for quite some time. To make it worse, public relations is often presented negatively in news associated with PR problems and PR disasters. Although public relations scholars have defined public relations as a management function, journalists perceive it otherwise. They see public relations as an image making or tactic-oriented profession followed by persuasion. Furthermore, negative stereotypes exist of PR people to intentionally withhold detrimental information, spread misinformation, attempt to bribe journalists through freebies, and to as far as buying media coverage. Journalists claim that public relations practitioners lack news sense and values, have inaccurate and poor quality writing, as well as often provide self-serving and biased information. These perceptions whether true or not lead to distrust and doubting the materials PR agents provide because the journalists do not want to fall as victims for tactics that they do not see through.

The explanations above are consistent with the findings of Larsson (2009, p. 137), which reveal that journalists are reluctant to discuss their relations with PR professionals in detail due to sensitivity from a normative perspective. The general normative thinking of journalism would consider PR people, especially consultants, as opponents who should be kept at a distance (p. 136). The Western media emphasize objectivity of news content and

the audience's right to know, in contrast, PR agents would always like to present the best image of their clients (Wu, 2011, p. 11).

Thus, it is natural that these assumed conflicts in interest and difference in perspectives would result in misunderstandings between the journalists and PR practitioners in the West. Even though the relationship between the PR practitioners and the media is full of tension in the United States and the Nordic countries, in China and East Asia, it is a different case, where relationships are more collaborative and mutual due to the cultural influence of *guanxi*. The next subsection will dig into the notion of *guanxi* and its influence on networking and relationship building in China.

2.3.2   The interpersonal relationship in the East

Various researchers have studied the interpersonal relationship within the Chinese culture, and have identified it as the Chinese *guanxi*. *Guanxi* is a complex notion deeply rooted in Chinese culture, shaped and molded throughout the five-thousand-year-old society. The word *guanxi* stands for "relationship(s)" in Chinese. It is in continued use today because of the difficulty to locate an equivalent English word to substitute its exact meaning. One of the reasons is because the word *guanxi* also carries the implicit meaning of power, social status and resource transmission (Hackley and Dong, 2001, p. 16). Hackley and Dong (2001) view *guanxi* as the most challenging barrier facing foreign public relations agencies in China. They cite Yan (1996), defining *guanxi* as "*a strategically constructed network of personal relationships*" (p. 16) that is rather private, and invisible set of relations sometimes seen as "payola" or as "under-the-table" dealings. Nojonen (2007), a doctoral student, who researched Chinese *guanxi* for his doctoral dissertation, even calls it the "Chinese third arm".

The notion of *guanxi* can be compared to the personal influence model that has being discovered in various cultures, such as Greece, India, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Huang (2000) believes that *guanxi* and the personal influence model are similar in nature,

and resemble each other in many ways. Therefore, the next few paragraphs will briefly explain the personal influence model in order to better understand the Chinese *guanxi* in comparison to the relationships in similar cultures. The personal influence model is principally developed by public relations scholar Krishnamurthy Sriramesh in year 1991 (Johnson, 2008, p. 6; Wu, 2011, p. 5). The work by James E. Grunig, Larissa Grunig, Sriramesh K., Yi-Hui Huang and Lyra Anastasia published in year 1995 in the *Journal of Public Relations Research* examined the personal influence model further and set a significant foundation for future research in the field (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang & Lyra 1995). Later on, quite a few researchers employed the personal influence model to probe public relations in various regions in Asia including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Huang, 2000; Sarusup & Kim, 2004; Wu, 2004; 2011). Sarusup and Kim (2004) and Huang (2000) in their studies of South Korea and Taiwan respectively, have both discovered and confirmed the existence of the personal influence model.

A Taiwanese researcher Wu Ming-Yi interviewed 7 Taiwanese public relations practitioners in her journal article published in year 2004, and later in year 2011 she conducted a meta-analysis of media relations in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Wu (2004; 2011, p. 9) put forth that the Taiwanese PR practitioners frequently practice the personal influence model and it is critical to the success of public relations in Taiwan. Huang's (2000, p. 180) literature review shows that the personal influence model has an unethical implication. It signifies that PR practitioners will try to establish personal relationships and friendships with key individuals in the media, government, or political and activist groups in order to acquire favors. For example, Grunig, et al., (1995, pp. 180-181) cite Sriramesh (1991) that 60% of the news released in India is due to personal influence and only 40% is because of news value, and cite Lyra (1991) that Greek practitioners pay their friends in the media for placing news articles.

However, a difference between the personal influence model and *guanxi* is that the latter does not necessarily have an unethical implication. Even though Nojonen (2007) and Zhang,

et al., (2009) point out that *guanxi* entails gifts giving, favor exchange, banquet invitations, and sometimes the manipulation to gain advantages, however, it is not unethical and unhealthy in nature. Rather, it is more about establishing a lasting one to one relationship (Zhang, et al., 2009, p. 231). In a nutshell, the personal influence model often exists in developing countries or high context cultures, where practitioners can build personal influence with key individuals working in the government or with the media. On the other hand, *guanxi* is more than building a personal influence to obtain favors and advantages. It is a long-term, harmonious and mutual relationship, which can exist between friends and families. That being said, the Chinese *guanxi* will be explored in detail next since it fits the Chinese relationship context better than the personal influence model.

Zhang and her colleagues from the Department of Communication of University of Maryland investigated and analyzed 15 Chinese public relations agencies' web sites and conducted 17 interviews with public relations professionals in China. The authors argue that *guanxi* is a main cultural aspect that influences public relations practice in China. Chinese interview participants in Zhang's, et al., (2009) study have continuously put forth the concept of *guanxi* as an important element of Chinese culture that profoundly affects the way they practice public relations. One communication manager gives an example of a situation where *guanxi* with government officials had came into use. Factories were required to relocate to the suburbs of Beijing during the Olympics. The communication manager had good *guanxi* with some government official, so they managed to get a reasonable extension of the deadline to relocate (p. 229). Furthermore, good *guanxi* with the media supports multinational to obtain resources, disseminate information, as well as coping with crisis more favorably.

Both Western and Chinese public relations scholars admit that a relationship with the media is even more crucial during crisis and difficult times (Jiang, 2007, p. 24). This is due to the agenda setting function of the media, which will surely affect the image of a corporation (Wu, 2004, p. 21). As a communication manager in China puts it, good relationship with

journalists will make it easier for positive messages to get out (Jiang, 2007, p.18). Sarusup and Kim (2004) even imply that having a personal relationship with the media in South Korea will help to minimize unfavorable media coverage. This finding is consistent with Wu (2011), who conveys that journalists are willing to soften or withhold negative news for the organizations that a PR practitioner represents if they have a close relationship. This is due to the importance of face-saving in high-context cultures stressed by both Wu (2011) and Nojonen (2007). Releasing negative news about a friend's organization can be regarded as a face-threatening act. Hence, in South Korea and Japan, public relations practitioner can prevent the release of negative news if he or she has a good interpersonal relationship with the journalist (Sarusup and Kim, 2004; Wu, 2011, p. 8).

The conveniences that *guanxi* may bring to a practitioner is perhaps why Wu (2011) suggests that establishing personal relationships with journalists is a critical job for public relation practitioners in East Asia. The author advises PR practitioners in the high context culture to build a long-term relationship with the journalists before sending press releases to them directly (p. 12). This is consistent with Victor's (1992) analysis of communications in high context cultures. In order to achieve the long-term goal of successful media relations, PR practitioners need to maintain good *guanxi* that is interpersonal relationship with journalists (Wu, 2004). It is argued that both parties will cooperate better with each other when a close interpersonal relationship is established through informal gatherings. In addition to the long-term goal of building interpersonal relationship, Taiwanese public relations practitioners also have to accomplish their short-term goal of gaining publicity through writing good news releases and run successful events for their clients.

The above findings from literature review have placed *guanxi* in a relatively negative light. However, most of the literature review focuses on regions outside Mainland China, for instance, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. There is in fact a lack of research regarding the impact that *guanxi* sets on media relations in Mainland China. For example, whether *guanxi* can help prevent the release of negative press coverage and how far *guanxi* helps the PR

practitioners during a crisis. There is no discussion of the extent of conveniences that *guanxi* brings to media relations practices in Mainland China. This research gap has been noted in this thesis research, and the findings will be discussed under the fifth chapter. What can be confirmed from the literature references is that the relationships between PR practitioners and the journalists are indeed more collaborative and interactional due to the influence of *guanxi*.

A reciprocal and collaborative relationship between practitioners and journalists has been identified both in Taiwan and in Mainland China. In the light of Jiang (2007), partnerships emerge as a trend in Mainland China, where communications between two parties have changed from being linear (one-way) into interactional (two-way). One communication manager in China comments in the interview that they have now become partners with the media and co-work on projects instead of just sending press releases and announcements to the journalists (Jiang, 2007, p. 23). Another interviewee underlines the importance of communication by pointing out that parties may discover exceptional topics that both find interesting and meaningful under well managed communications (pp. 20-21). According to Wu (2004, p. 21), this kind of relationship exists because the media needs press releases from PR practitioners as news sources, and the corporations need publicity to address the public about their products and services.

In summary, and answering to the second research question, the relations between the U.S. journalists and PR practitioners are more of on-line type of source-reporter relations whereas in East Asia it is more informal and closer (Wu, 2011; Larsson, 2009). As a result, Chinese journalists are more receptive to news sources from PR professionals than Western journalists who would describe PR practitioners as opponents. This interpersonal and collaborative relationship between PR practitioners and journalists in China can be mainly attributed to the Chinese *guanxi*. Consequently, gift giving and informal gatherings take place frequently in media relations as a part of the *guanxi* building process. The above sections have answered the first and second research questions, and explained how high

context culture and *guanxi* influence media relations practices. The next section will continue to examine other aspects of Chinese culture which impact the practice of media relations.

2.4 Confucianism and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

This subsection will continue to explore and discuss other aspects of culture that influence the practice of media relations in China as identified by previous researchers. The thesis literature review has already pointed out and examined the Hall's cultural context and the Chinese *guanxi.* The latter is a unique aspect of Chinese culture that deeply affects the networking and relationship building in media relations. Several scholars suggest that *guanxi* is actually penetrated by the three principles of Confucius and strongly correlated with Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Chen & Culbertson, 2003; Hackley & Dong, 2001). This means that these aspects of Chinese culture are somewhat interrelated. The literature references show that the three principles of Confucius and Hofstede's cultural dimensions influence the practice of public relations and media relations. Therefore, this subsection will first investigate the intertwined relation between *guanxi*, Confucianism and Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Then it will discuss how the latter two affect media relations practices.

Hackley and Dong (2001) argue that the Chinese *guanxi* is deeply rooted and penetrated by Confucius' three principles. The authors put forth, the differences between Western societies and the Chinese society, in terms of cultural and social development, lie upon Confucianism. Sarusup and Kim (2004, p. 294) elaborate that Confucianism focuses on relationships among individuals, sees people as relational beings that are socially situated and defined within an interactive context. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) is a Chinese philosopher, educator and politician. Confucius is the founding father of the Confucius' paradigm, which has influenced and contributed to framing the mainstream of Chinese cultural values, for 2500 years (Hackley & Dong, 2001, p. 17). In the light of Hackley and Dong (2001), Confucianism has three major principles, *Li, Ren,* and *Xiao*. *Li* refers to structure; *Ren* implies gentleness and love; *Xiao* indicates loyalty and obedience. The three

principles also set the basis for *guanxi,* which is a cultural and social product of the Chinese society.

Li determines the social structure and status for *guanxi* to take roots. The *Li* principle emphasizes the social structure of the society to be based on a hierarchical order. Judging by Confucianism, personal relationships are all in hierarchical pairs, such as boss and employee, father and child, teacher and student (Hackly and Dong, 2011, p 17). To some extent, the relationship between the PR practitioner and the journalist could also be viewed as a hierarchical pair, where the party at the lower end tries to please the party at the higher end in order to gain support and assistance. Applying the *Li* principle to media relations in China, it becomes evident why partnership and collaboration between PR practitioners and journalists are more common. It also explains some of the strategies and tactics PR practitioners employ such as gift giving and sponsorship to the media.

The *Ren* principle frames the relationships between people, and the interaction among them, which considerably differ from the Western society. The Western social networking between professionals is based on socialization environments guided by professional standards or ethics. It has no implication of returning a favor, nor the obligation to escalate this exchange. *Ren* based *guanxi* encourages people to help each other and most importantly, being honored to repay others' favors. Hackley and Dong (2001, pp. 17-18) express that there is a common saying in China: if one does you a favor, you would repay ten times in return that is "*One good turn deserves another*". If a party accepts a favor from another party, the recipient must repay with an even bigger favor to maintain *guanxi*. Thus, reciprocity in the relationship fosters the growth of *guanxi*.

The last principle, *Xiao,* aims at maintaining a social order (Hackley & Dong, 2001, p. 17). It stipulates how people interact based on their role in the relationship. The meaning of *Xiao* is to exert loyalty and obedience. People in the lower social hierarchy must respect and obey the ones in the higher social hierarchy. For example, a student must obey and be

loyal to his teacher; a son must obey and be loyal to his father. If the media and PR practitioner are also in a hierarchical pair, then obedience and loyalty will also exist between them. The three principles, to some extent, explain the collaborative relationship between the PR practitioners and journalists in China.

Hackley and Dong (2001, p. 17) stress that behavior against the hierarchical order is considered abnormal in Chinese culture. In the Western societies, on the contrary, social interaction is based on equality, freedom and personal interests (p. 18). Respect and reputation are earned by individuals rather than defined by the social structure. Huang (2000) proposes that the principles of Confucianism might distort the practice of public relations because the principles do not fit into the Western theories of public relations. Rightly practiced public relations put importance to fairness, openness and equality. On the other hand, the principles of Confucianism emphasize harmony and loyalty to the party in a higher hierarchical level. As a result, the outcomes listed in the theoretical framework (Fig. 5) can be partly explained by Confucianism. In fact, there are more common grounds between Confucianism, *guanxi*, Hall's cultural context and Hofstede's cultural dimensions than expected. Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be introduced next and its influence on media relations practices will be expounded.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions are named after the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede. Hofstede conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. He collected and analyzed IBM employee values scores in more than 70 countries between year 1967 and 1973 (The Hofstede Centre, 2012a). The four cultural dimensions discovered by Hofstede in his original theory are: power distance index (PDI), individualism versus collectivism (IDV), masculinity versus femininity (MAS), and uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). A fifth dimension was added in 1991 based on a research conducted in Hong Kong using China Value Survey. The dimension is based on Confucian dynamism and is labeled as long-term orientation versus short-term orientation (LTO).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions are still widely used, even in the modern days, to examine cultural values and behaviors in foreign countries and are an importance piece of foundation in cross-cultural communication as well as other research fields. The Hofstede Centre (2012a) indicates that culture only exists by comparison. The country scores should be viewed in comparison to other countries because the scores are relative. Hence, Figure 4 has positioned China in comparison with its Asian neighbors and Western societies.
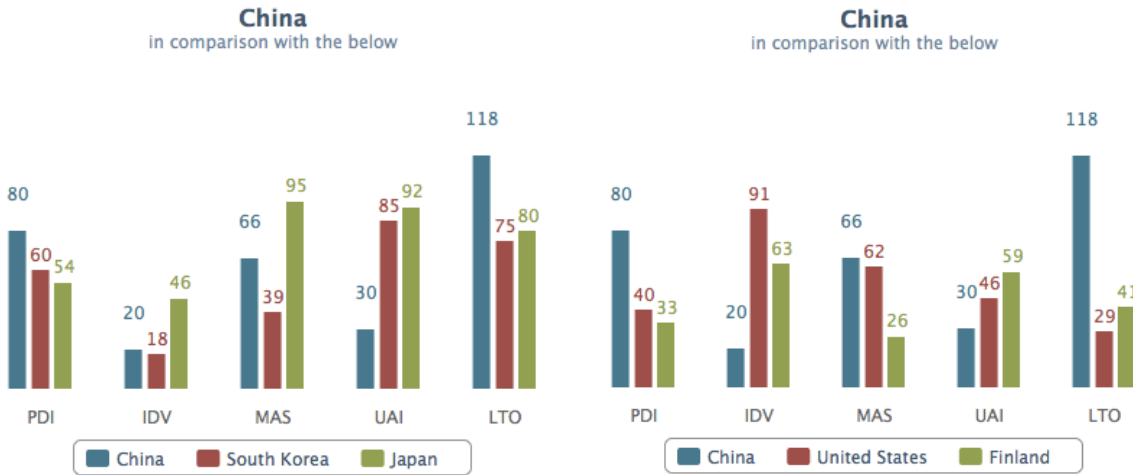
Figure 4. The Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions - China in Comparison with Other Nation
Figure From: The Hofstede Centre (2012b)

At a score of 80, China is high on power distance, higher than its East Asian neighbors and much higher than the United States and Finland. On the other hand, China scores low in individualism, about the same as South Korea and half of Japan. Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 25) cite Hofstede (2001) that power distance and individualism do in fact correlate negatively and strongly across nations in general. However, it is interesting, that China resembles Western societies a great deal in masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, scoring close to the United States and Britain. With the exception of Nordic countries, which are among the few exceptional ones in the West that are more feminine than masculine. China has practically scored the highest in long-term orientation, followed by

Hong Kong as second and Taiwan as third at 96 and 87 respectively. It is far higher than the United States and Finland, and even higher than South Korea and Japan by one third.

Among the five cultural dimensions, the most relevant two dimensions influencing media relations practices are collectivism and long-term orientation, which correlate strongly with *guanxi* and principle of *Ren*. The dimension of collectivism addresses the degree of interdependence among society members, and whether members tend to see themselves as "I" or as "We". The Hofstede Centre (2012b) conveys that people in individualist societies are more likely to look after themselves and their direct family only, whereas in collectivist societies people look after extended families and "in group" members as well. This is in fact extremely similar to what the Chinese *guanxi* is about, as Chen and Culbertson (2003) point out, a major aspect of Chinese collectivism is *guanxi*. Scholars claim that collectivism acts as an obstacle to open, fair and equal public relations practices by prioritizing small group interests and interpersonal relations (Huang 2000). The following is an illustration of such practice.

In collectivist cultures, in-group relations, including friends and relatives, tend to get preferential treatment (Chen & Culbertson, 2003). For example, PR agency J does a better job at a lower price than PR agency F, but PR agency F has established a good interpersonal relationship or perhaps is an old classmate of the public relations director in Z Corporation. As a result, the public relations director in Z Corporation chooses PR agency F to be their service provider. In the case of media relations, journalists might consider more favorably the PR practitioners that they are more familiar with. These are common phenomena in a collectivist society, which is perhaps why the Chinese PR practitioners stress the importance of relationship building with the journalists more than the Western practitioners. Moreover, a great deal of time and effort is needed to develop relationships of trust before one can get down to business in China. As the earlier literature references suggest, PR practitioners in East Asia, should always try to form a relationship with the journalists before sending press releases to them.

In addition to collectivism, long-term orientation is another dimension that is closely related to the teachings of Confucius, which affect strategic thinking and tactical planning in public relations and media relations (Hofstede Centre 2012b; Chen and Culbertson 2003). In long-term oriented societies, people are future-oriented, e.g. on relationships, on investments, and on enjoyments. With a score of 118, China is highly long-term oriented, where persistence, perseverance, patience and hard work are common attributes among the society, and regarded important. Zhang et al., (2009, p. 229) analyzed various websites of PR agencies in China. The findings reveal, to varying degrees, these agencies all emphasize building long-term quality relationships with their clients, and helping these clients to cultivate lasting relationships with their audiences.

Collectivism and long-term orientation are outcomes of Confucian societies, which lead to a cultural aspect of preserving *face* (Chen & Culbertson, 2003). It is interesting that a similar deduction is made earlier by Wu (2011) in the discussion of how saving *face* is a unique aspect of the high context culture. Meanwhile, the importance of *face* is also believed by scholars to stem from *guanxi*. This, in one way, proves that these aspects of culture do share similar grounds. Chen and Culbertson (2003) express, the emphasis on *guanxi* and the drive to save face, contribute to a society that is based on people, and not laws. This environment does appear to be slowly changing. The authors cite Burns (1999) and Yan (2000) stating that the Chinese legislature known as the Congress of People's Deputies has enacted thousands of formal laws (p. 29). Such laws, nevertheless, are generally applied within context of particular situations and relationships. These findings are consistent with Wu (2011), who confirms the situational nature of high context cultures, that, rules and regulations are less followed.

Apart from collectivism and long-term orientation, power distance also affects the media relations practices to some extent. This cultural dimension shares some similarities with the *Li* principle and the *Xiao* principle, which maintains that the society is based on a hierarchical order. China ranks relatively high in power distance compared to other nations.

This means inequality exists in the society, that, power is distributed unequally and people accept this fact (The Hofstede Centre, 2012b). This in turn indicates that people in the higher hierarchy may abuse their powers, and there is no defense against such abuse. To some extent, the acceptance of gifts and monetary benefits from the PR practitioner can be viewed as abuse of power by the media, which appears to fit the profile of a high power distance society. This dimension has likely resulted for an interviewee in Jiang's (2007) study to claim that there is nothing PR practitioners can do to stop the practice of media allowance even knowing the associated ethical dilemma.

The rest two cultural dimensions, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, appear to be less relevant to media relations practices. With a score of 66, China somewhat resembles many Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom in masculinity. This means the society is driven by competition, and is success oriented, rather than prioritizing the quality of life and caring for others, e.g. feminine society like Finland (The Hofstede Centre, 2012b). Chen and Culbertson (2003), in addition, associate masculinity to the statuses of men and women in China. However, it could be assumed that in China, women and men working in the public relations profession are treated relatively equally since none of the researchers has discovered evidence to indicate otherwise.

It has been exposed that South Korea, as a highly masculine society, places practitioners in different roles based on gender. Sarusup and Kim (2004, p. 301) disclose that it is generally unacceptable for women to build personal relationship with the media. This task is left for male PR practitioners due to masculine tendency in the culture, where the perception lays that media relations is hard and difficult, and male practitioners can drink with journalists (p. 302). As a result, most female PR practitioners are placed in charge of internal communications whereas male practitioners get to practice external communications where media relations occur. On the basis of the literature references, this phenomenon has not yet been distinguished in China.

Lastly, there seems to be limited analysis of media relations under the uncertainty avoidance dimension. This dimension addresses how comfortable is the society with ambiguous or unknown situations; whether people try to control their future or lean on their fate (The Hofstede Centre, 2012b). China's score in uncertainty avoidance is totally opposite of its Asian neighbors such as Japan and South Korea, and even lower than the United States and Finland. This might be the reason why Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 28) remark that this dimension seems very complex in the case of China, which does not show up very clearly in the Chinese Value Survey. The lack of references has been taken into account in the thesis research, and some interesting findings have actually emerged from participant observation and interviews, which explain how high uncertainty avoidance influences media relations practices in China. They will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

To sum up, the differences in culture pose challenges for PR practitioners to practice media relations in accordance to the Western countries. In addition to the high context culture and *guanxi* discussed in the previous sections, Confucianism and Hofstede's cultural dimensions also impact the practice of media relations. This section deducts that these aspects of culture are actually intertwined and share common grounds. According to the literature references, these aspects of culture have led to the outcomes listed in the theoretical framework (Fig. 5). They have caused some context specific and localized practices in the Chinese media relations such as gift giving, acceptance of monetary benefits, reliance on information subsidy, etc. The next section will present and discuss the theoretical framework that is built on the basis of the literature review.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The thesis theoretical framework (Fig. 5), which can also be considered as the analytical framework, is constructed and developed based on the research questions and the literature review. The sources for Figure 5 and how it can be interpreted will be explained and elaborated below.

Figure 5. Thesis Theoretical Framework

The top side of Figure 5 consists important aspects of the Chinese culture that have been identified by previous researchers as having an impact on public relations practices in China (See 2.2.2; 2.3.2; 2.4). This part is targeted at solving the third research question. In the middle is a list of the daily practices of media relations summarized from the subsection 2.2.1 of this current Chapter, which is relevant for answering the first research question. The list is not conclusive. It is only a snapshot of the media relations practices that are mentioned in the literature references. Lastly, in the bottom are the outcomes of media relations practices that appear to be different from the original practices deriving from the United States, which are possibly influenced by the Chinese culture, as discovered by previous researchers (See 2.2.2; 2.3; 2.4). This final part of the framework aims to answer the second and third research questions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will introduce and justify the research methodology employed for this thesis, as well as discussing the trustworthiness of the study. As mentioned in the first chapter, the two research methodologies adopted are interview and participant observation. These two qualitative approaches are selected with the aim to generate insights and foster deeper understandings from the participants or interviewees. Interview allows the researcher to ask follow up questions for insights and clarification. Rich and detailed answers can be obtained from qualitative interviews opposed to quantitative research (Bryman, 2004, p. 313). On the other hand, observation is an extraordinary research method to observe hidden practices and daily behaviors that are often taken for granted.

It is suggested by McNamara (1999) that interviews are especially useful for getting information from the interviewee's personal experiences. Facts are gathered during an interview along with interpretation of meanings (Kvale, 1996). Interviews also tend to focus more on the interviewee's point of view rather than the researcher's concerns in quantitative approach (Bryman, 2004, p. 313). Since personal experience, opinions and impressions from public relations professionals are likely to provide the best answers for the research questions, thus, interview could be concluded to function as a good method for this research.

There are two suitable interview structures for the nature of this particular research topic, an unstructured conversational interview or a semi-structure interview with open-ended questions. Based on Nojonen's (2007) research in Mainland China on *guanxi* practices, it could be assumed that conversational interview might make the interviewee feel more at ease to talk about the issues they would like to discuss and the researcher could follow up when interesting points come up. However, semi-structured interview might allow the researcher to gain more valuable information, since a set of questions that the researcher is interested in could be asked to all interviewees. This procedure also allows for comparison of the answers afterwards. A semi-structured interview instead of an unstructured interview

will be conducted for this study. This is because the other methodology – observation, is in a way a substitute for the unstructured conversational interview, which already allows for random conversations with PR professionals.

Participant observation usually allows the researcher to be in closer contact with people for a longer period of time compared to other methods such as interviews and surveys. This is likely to generate more understanding and trust between the researcher and the participant, which in turn would make the interview with the participant conducted later on easier and more revealing. Participant observation will result the interviewees to be fixed rather than sampled randomly (Bryman, 2004). However, it will also enable the researcher to select the most suitable candidates for interviews. The participants under observation are often interviewed. Instead of relying solely on what is said in the interviews, participants' behavior observed during the observation can be compared. The things that participants or interviewees take for granted, such as the practice of daily routine work, are likely to be discovered by the researcher during observation as well. (Bryman, 2004, p. 328)

Adopting two methodologies for this study, interview and participant observation, will enable triangulation, and the questions arise from observation can also be clarified during interviews. Observation may even give ideas for the interview (Bryman, 2004). However, the participants may act differently knowing that they are being observed. Therefore, observing PR practitioners while working alongside with them during internship will permit both purposes to be carried out without interruption to either one. Furthermore, participant observation is an excellent methodology choice when the issue or question under study is something hidden and deviant that people are reluctant to talk about (Bryman, 2004). Cultural practices are often hard to express and explain. Sometimes, cultural practices may even lead practitioners into gray areas, such as the practice of *guanxi,* as discussed earlier, is a dominant part of the Chinese culture that influences profoundly public relations practice in Mainland China. Nojonen (2009) reveals in his doctoral dissertation that the Chinese interviewees were reluctant and alarmed to discuss *guanxi*

practices. He even received warnings from the Chinese government forbidding him to dig into these issues.

Apart from the above advantages of participant observation, it is also a research methodology that has not yet been employed for studying public relations in China. Therefore, new insights are likely to emerge by adopting this new approach. Zhang, et al., (2009) adopted content analysis and in-depth interview for their article. Jiang (2007) interviewed eight in-house public relations practitioners working in multinationals in Beijing and Shanghai over phone calls. Li, et al., (2012) conducted a quantitative approach using online survey to examine perceived public relations professional standards in China. Wu (2004) interviewed seven Taiwanese PR practitioners, and later Wu (2011) carried out a meta-analysis to compare media relations in East Asia and the United States. The reason why other research methodologies were chosen over participant observation is likely due to the difficulty in getting access and following PR practitioners throughout their daily jobs.

The trustworthiness of the study will be discussed in relation to the four criteria proposed by Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 411). The four criteria are confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability. The first criterion confirmability is related to objectivity of the study. The interviewer and the observer play critical roles in the interview method and participant observation (McNamara, 1999; Bryman, 2004). Positivists may argue that qualitative research cannot be objective due to the unavoidable influence and subjectivity from the researcher. Kvale (1996) disagrees with this view by arguing that objectivity in itself is a subjective notion. Qualitative research can be objective when the result is agreeable among independent researchers or observers. The interview method is neither subjective nor objective by allowing the interviewees to speak and express "the real nature of the object" (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Nonetheless, it is still important for the researcher to be fair and unbiased (McNamara, 1999). That is, being neutral, without presumptions and without leading the interviewee to give a certain answer or allowing prejudices and personal emotions influence the observation. These are especially important since a

relationship will be formed between the researcher and the participants during observation. Also, checking the facts with the interviewee after the interview is a good practice to be kept in mind (McNamara 1999).

The second criterion credibility could be ensured through following good scientific conventions by paying attention to data collection and analysis as well as the selection of suitable research methodologies. The research steps are explained and documented in the next Chapter, and the selection of research methodologies are justified and elaborated under the current Chapter. The findings from the interviews are validated and triangulated with observation, and vice versa. The theoretical framework (Fig 5) will also be applied to make the connection between the findings and the theories to enhance credibility. However, because the interviews are conducted in Chinese and translated to English by the researcher, thus, there might be translation errors. The researcher will take full responsibility for any misinterpretations and errors in translation. Even though only five interviews are conducted in this study, which appear to be limited, the researcher believe that the qualities of the interviews are more important than the quantity. This means that interviewing the participants who are specialized in media relations and who are willing to talk openly about the practices are most important, which also enhances credibility.

The third criterion transferability can also be understood as generalizability. Due to the fact that the observation will be confined to a specific department and team, and the interview participants are from a single case company, so the question whether the study could be generalized arises. As mentioned and briefly explained in the first Chapter, the findings related to the second and third research questions should be generalizable to some extent since relationship between PR practitioners and journalists are rooted in the culture and social norms rather than determined by the agency. The same logic applies to the cultural impact on media relations, which should be similar throughout the industry independent of the work place since the same aspects of Chinese culture would affect the whole industry.

The limitation of transferability will be discussed further in Chapter 6 in association to individual findings.

The last criterion dependability, which can also be referred to as reliability, could be enhanced by clearly documenting the key research steps so that another researcher could reach the same findings and arrive at the same conclusion by repeating the study. Following Kvale (1996)'s seven stages of an interview investigation and the analytic procedure proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2011) are likely to enhance the dependability of the study. The relevant citations from the interviews are also provided, which increases dependability. However, not providing the whole interview transcript might slightly compromise dependability. The next Chapter will present a detailed account and description of how the observation and interviews are carried out, and how the data is collected, recorded and analyzed.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Participant observation was conducted at an advertising and public relations agency in Beijing – Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide. It is one of the leading public relations agencies in China, and the largest public relations agency in Taiwan with 60 staff members (Wu, 2004, p. 20). Ogilvy is headquartered in New York with 146 international locations (Das, 2010, p. 238). The agency is a subsidiary of the WPP Group which is a leader in advertising and marketing service, and number one family in organized marketing (Das, 2010, p. 324). In China, Ogilvy is a representative of IBM, Kodak, National Semiconductor, Unilever, Bally of Switzerland, BMW and Clairol, in year 2000 (Ritchey, 2000, 28-29). It represented various multinational tech corporations while the observation took place in year 2010, including Nokia, Intel, IBM and Dell. Overall, it is a good representative of a multinational PR agencies operating in China.

A three-months internship with an Ogilvy PR team took place in Fall 2010. The responsibilities and daily tasks included translating, summarizing and proofreading press releases, news articles, interview transcripts, etc. The researcher also helped with the compilation and translation of newsletters and media coverage reports for the client, and assisted in the organization of events among other routine administration work for the team such as filling out everyday paper work, as well as scanning, printing and copying of files. There were eight PR practitioners in the team, who all worked and sat in close proximity of each other. The team can talk to each other from where they sit and hear each other's conversations and phone calls. This somewhat provided conveniences to the observation.

The PR team served a multinational IT client, and the interview participants have all served IT clients or were still serving IT clients. This focus allowed depth and insights into the particular industry on media relations, which could be viewed as another niche for this research. None of the other researchers had targeted a single industry or a single PR agency for their research. For example, Zhang et al., (2009, p. 228) interviewed PR practitioners

from a variety of industries, including information technology, aerospace, home appliances, automobile, electronics, cosmetics, banking, and real estate.

Notes were taken during the observation and immediately after work while memory was still fresh. Interesting behaviors and practices were discovered during the observation that helped to mold the interview questions. Interviewees were selected among the PR practitioners that the researcher worked with or came across with during the internship, except for Participant A. As pointed out in the research methodology, participant observation allowed the researcher to find the most suitable candidates for the interview, whom the researcher believed to know the best about media relations and who were comfortable to talk openly about it. The Table 1 summarizes and provides basic information regarding the interview participants.

Table 1. Interview Participants

Participant	Years of Experience	Client Industry	Recorded Interview Time
Participant A	Over 20 years	IT and others	23 minutes
Participant B	2 years	Information Technology	47 minutes
Participant C	2 years		
Participant D	4 years		31 minutes
Participant E	2 years		30 minutes

The first participant, Participant A, is currently the President of Ogilvy PR in North Asia. He is an Ogilvy veteran who started his career with the agency from the New York Office more than twenty years ago. He moved to China in year 1995, founded and helped to found Ogilvy PR offices in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The idea of interviewing Participant A arose from reading an article by David Ritchey, cited also in the literature references, who interviewed him in year 2000. At that time, Participant A was the managing director of Ogilvy & Mather Public Relations in Beijing. In the light of Ritchey

(2000, p. 29), Participant A supervised the Chinese public relations efforts for some clients, and for some other clients, he worked throughout the orient.

A thought emerged that Participant A was the perfect candidate for this thesis topic since he was an experienced PR practitioner who must know a great deal about Chinese culture and how it has impacted public relations in China. Consequently, the researcher reached out to Participant A by email, and asked if he could do an interview for this thesis. Being as busy as he was, Participant A was truly kind and generous to allocate time for the interview. Apart from Participant A, the researcher had an interpersonal relationship with the remaining four participants. The interview took place during June 2011, about half year after the internship, during which the researcher had formed an outside of work relationship with the interviewees, which also facilitated the interviews. The interview with Participant B and Participant C was conducted at the same time as the Table 1 shows. It enabled two participants to build on and constructively comment on each other's thoughts and viewpoints. The two participants were colleagues working in the same team, and had a great relationship with each other, so they were comfortable to talk freely and openly with each other being present.

Bryman (2004) suggests to (tape) record the interviews, so that they could be transcribed. However, Chinese interviewees are usually reluctant to have their interviews recorded when sensitive issues are discussed, as Nojonen (2009) reveals in his dissertation that even having a turned-off tape recorder on the table during a conversation or interview makes the interviewee nervous. Even if some agree to have their interview recorded, they might still feel restricted to talk openly about the hidden practices. Having a personal relationship with the Chinese interviewees instilled trust, all of them agreed to have the interview recorded. Although there may still have been things that they kept to themselves, the researcher believe that they were already much more revealing in these interviews than they would have done so with a random researcher.

All of the interviews took place during lunch or dinner over the dining table, except the interview with Participant A, which was conducted at a meeting room in Ogilvy. As Nojonen (2007) and other scholars acknowledge, business deals in Asian cultures and in China are often closed over the dining table. This is perhaps because the Chinese in general become relaxed and delighted when dining with great food, thus, this ambiance tends to facilitate cooperation and collaboration. Therefore, interview over lunch and dinner had made the interviews more revealing to some extent. Lastly, the researcher did a test recording beforehand in order to make sure that the loud background noise did not interfere with the quality of the recording.

Only five interviews were conducted due to the fact that quality and depth were the priorities. It was important to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable to talk freely about public relations in Mainland China. During the observation, it was noted that junior and senior level PR practitioners were in charge of the media relations and writing press releases, whereas manager and director level practitioners' daily job was more about supervision, counseling and collaborating with PR managers from the client firms. Therefore, four of the interviewees were junior and senior PR practitioners who dealt with the media on a daily basis. Based on the responses from the participants and based on the issues that were noticed from observation, follow-up questions and additional questions were asked to facilitate more information and clarify some of the issues that came to the researcher's mind. For example, it was asked how the participants approach unknown journalists and develop new media contacts, which is not a question listed in the Appendix.

For the interview, the thesis has taken into account Kvale (1996, p. 88)'s seven stages of an interview investigation. The seven stages are: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. For the analytic procedure, this thesis adopted seven phases proposed by Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 209): (1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data,

(5) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study.

Thematizing: Research topic, questions and niche were defined first.

Designing: A participant observation in Ogilvy after the preliminary literature review was conducted. This alongside with the literature review had contributed to the design of the interview questions. The questions were also sent to the thesis supervisor for checking and modification.

Interviewing: Interview questions were sent to all interviewees a couple of days before the interview so they had time to think about it. The research topic and the aim of the study were also made clear to the interviewees. Before the interview began, the researcher asked interviewee's permission to tape record it, and used an iPhone to do the voice recording. The interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language, so Chinese language was spoken with Chinese participants, and English was used with Participant A.

Transcribing: The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible within the next few days so that they could be interpreted as accurately as possible while the researcher's memory were still fresh. The Chinese interviews were translated into English, and proofread for data analysis. As pointed out earlier, there may be translation errors and misinterpretations, which the researcher will take full responsibilities of.

Analyzing: The interview transcript of each participant was carefully reviewed. Then they were broken down and color-coded in accordance to the interview questions that they were related to. Transcripts from different interviewees were assigned different text colors. Participant A was black, Participant B was purple, Participant C was orange, Participant D was blue and Participant E was red. This coding system allowed easier identification and kept the data more organized. After the transcript was categorized and coded, they were

reviewed and analyzed again with the literature review and observation in mind to ensure that they were interpreted as accurately as possible.

Verifying: Instead of sending a draft of transcripts to participants for their review, the findings from the interview were verified with notes taken during the observation, and to the theoretical framework. The reason why the data were not verified with the interview participants after the interview was because of the concern that they might ask to leave out some of the things that were said during the interview when they see them in writing. Some sensitive things were brought up during the interview as the reader may see from the next Chapter.

Reporting: Lastly, the findings were discussed and reported in this thesis.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter will answer the research problem and research questions. The first section will respond to the first research question on how the Chinese PR practitioners define public relations and media relations, and how the practitioners carry out their daily responsibilities. The second section will answer the second research question by bringing to light the relationship between the PR practitioner and the journalists in China, and the possible influences and differences due to culture. Meanwhile, the third section will respond to the last research question by providing detailed examples and illustrations on how the Chinese culture has affected the practice of media relations. It will look closely into the practices that have been influenced, and will also examine the aspects of Chinese culture that have brought these impacts.

Two of the most significant findings discovered and unveiled in this thesis are the practices of media allowance and soft articles. The latter is similar to advertorials in the Western countries. These two practices result from the Chinese culture and customs, and are overlooked and neglected in previous research partly because they do not exist in the Western public relations. Also, the Chinese practitioners seem to be reluctant to discuss and reveal details about these practices to outsiders. The primary reason that this thesis is able to identify and gain insights regarding these two practices is attributed to the participant observation, which shed light on their significant roles in Chinese media relations. Moreover, observation gave the opportunity to foster a personal relationship with the participants that allowed the interviews to generate meaningful insights on these hidden practices. This chapter will add new knowledge regarding some of the concepts and practices mentioned in previous research, and will even correct a few misunderstandings from the past research.

Before moving into the next section, it should be made clear that the journalists mentioned under this chapter will also include the editors and reporters, if not otherwise stated. This is because the Chinese PR practitioners often view and treat them inseparably, so when they

talk about journalists, they subconsciously mean journalists, editors and reporters as the same group. Instead of writing: journalists, editors and reporters, the word "journalist" will be used to represent the three titles simultaneously.
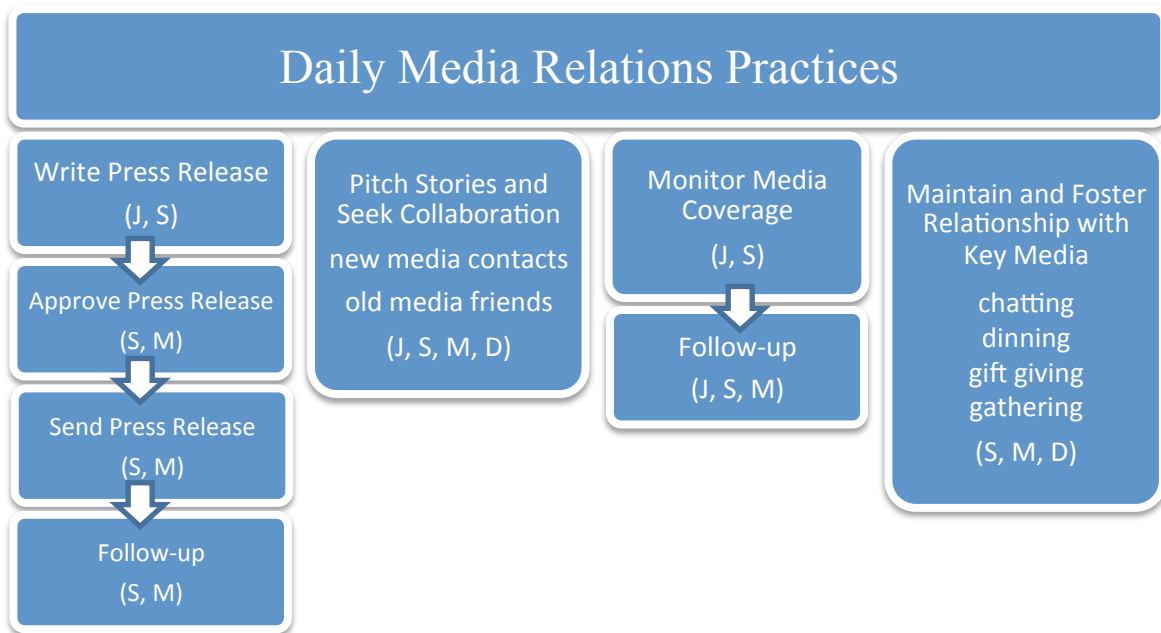
5.1 The Practice of Media Relations in China

This section will explore the daily job and responsibilities of a PR practitioner, and briefly compare them to the West in order to observe the differences in practice. It will display and illustrate from the perspective of PR professionals working in Ogilvy regarding how public relations and media relations are perceived and practiced. First and foremost, it will describe the daily responsibilities of media relations. Secondly, it will examine the communications preferences between Chinese PR practitioners and journalists. Thirdly, it will demonstrate how the PR practitioners pitch stories and seek collaboration from the media, and how to develop new media contacts. Lastly, it will present ways for a PR practitioner to identify his or her key media partners. Some citations from the interview are placed to Appendix 3 in order to avoid the overflow of quotations. Overall, this section will provide answer to the first research question.

5.1.1   An overview of daily media relations in Ogilvy

In order to answer the first research question, "*How is media relations carried out on a daily basis in Ogilvy & Mather?"* one needs to understand the daily media relations responsibilities of a PR practitioner in Ogilvy. Figure 6 displays the daily media relations practices in Ogilvy. The figure is created based on observation that is the three months internship with the agency and interviews with the participants. It provides a general overview of the possible daily media relations practices within a team in Ogilvy. It also shows the task division within a PR team in Ogilvy that is who is usually responsibility for each task. Figure 6 is inconclusive, and should be interpreted as in most cases or oftentimes rather than always. Findings show that the task division among Ogilvy IT teams is highly specific. People who write press releases and monitor the media coverage are not

necessarily the people who would then communicate to the media. Next, Figure 6 will be elaborate in detail.

Daily Media Relations Practices

Write Press Release (J, S)	Pitch Stories and Seek Collaboration	Monitor Media Coverage (J, S)	Maintain and Foster Relationship with Key Media
Approve Press Release (S, M)	new media contacts	Follow-up (J, S, M)	chatting dinning
Send Press Release (S, M)	old media friends (J, S, M, D)		gift giving gathering (S, M, D)
Follow-up (S, M)			

Position	Junior (J)	Senior (S)	Manager (M)	Director (D)
Years of Experience	0-2	3-5	6-10	More than 10

Figure 6. Daily Media Relations Practices

The four branches in Figure 6 represent four of the main responsibilities within media relations that are carried out on a daily basis. These will be explained in the order from left to right. The furthest to left of Figure 6 describes the process of passing information to the media in the form of press release. Writing and sending press releases to the media is a major component of media relations for a PR practitioner in Ogilvy, especially for the junior practitioners who oftentimes write press releases on a daily basis. The aim of these press releases is to keep the journalists updated and informed rather than getting them published every time[1]. This finding is consistent with Jiang (2007) that PR professionals

tend to keep journalists informed with the goal of having them turn to the PR people for materials and information when they foresee a newsworthy story. This is also a sophisticated way that will actually obtain better media coverage.

Participant C[2] further suggests that it is a common phenomenon that only a few journalists would publish what he sends them, and this also happens with the journalists who he has a relationship with. Therefore, in cases when the PR team truly needs to get the information released to the public or after they make a media allowance payment, they tend to call the journalists that they have a relationship with and follow up. The concept of media allowance will be clarified and discussed in the third section of this chapter.

In addition to regularly sending press releases to the media, another important responsibility of a PR practitioner is to constantly seek collaboration opportunities and pitch stories to the media (second to left in Figure 6). Participant A[3] expresses that he would sometimes call to the media to pitch stories for important clients or issues. Meanwhile, Participant C[4] indicates that he communicates to the media on a regular basis to get to know their focuses and interests in order to find opportunities for collaboration. This is consistent with the finding of the two-way communications and collaborative relationship by Jiang (2007).

Another daily responsibility of a PR practitioner regarding media relations is the monitoring of media coverage on a daily basis or after an event (second to right in Figure 6). The objective is to keep track of the articles published and follow up with individual media and journalist when there is a need. Lastly, an important aspect of media relations is for PR practitioners to maintain and foster a good relationship with the relevant media (first to right in Figure 6). This requires the PR practitioner to chat, dine, give gifts and meet with the media on a regular basis or during special occasions. The importance of establishing a personal relationship with the media will be explained and elaborated in the next section.

One interesting finding deriving from the interview is the high degree of specialization within media relations, which is not mentioned in any of the reviewed literature. One would assume from the literature review that the people who write the press releases would also send these out, and who would communicate with the media. However, this is not the case. Participants B and Participant C who are in junior positions commented in the interview that they see themselves spending only five percent of their time interacting with the media nevertheless they write press release on a daily basis. Participant C indicates, *"I hope to deal with them [the media] over sixty percent of my time but the fact is that I only deal with them for five percent of my time".*

Participant E explains that in a large PR agency such as Ogilvy, task division is specific and responsibilities are different among individuals. According to Participant B and Participant C[5], the practitioners who reach out to the media are middle level managers who can take charge of a project. They will frequently interact with key media. The junior practitioners are often responsible for drafting the press releases and deal with scattered online media while the senior practitioners will proofread the press releases and communicate with the key media.

To summarize, four of the daily main responsibilities of media relations are identified and presented in this subsection, which answers the first research question that asks how media relations is carried out on a daily basis in Ogilvy. Figure 6 illustrates the main daily responsibilities of media relations and identifies the PR practitioners who would perform these tasks on a daily basis. In order to determine how these practices are actually carried out, the next logical step will be to look at the communications between the PR practitioners and the journalists. Consequently, the next subsection will investigate how communications and interactions take place between a PR practitioner and journalists on a daily basis.

5.1.2 Choices of communications

The choice of medium for communication between the PR practitioner and the journalists plays a vital role in media relations. The findings from the literature review and this study both show that the Chinese pay particular attention to the context of communications, which includes the choice of communications medium. The interview participants point out that all sorts of communication medium can be used in media relations including email, phone call, online chat, social media sites and face-to-face meetings. However, during the interview discussions with the participants, it is discovered that the participants have unconsciously taken the choice of communications for granted, and do not notice that they have actually selected different communications medium for varying purposes. In other words, the PR practitioners are truly specific about how to deliver a message but because it often comes natural to them so they do not notice the behavior. Figure 7 illustrates the detailed choices of communications medium that surge from the interview, which has been verified against observations made during the internship.
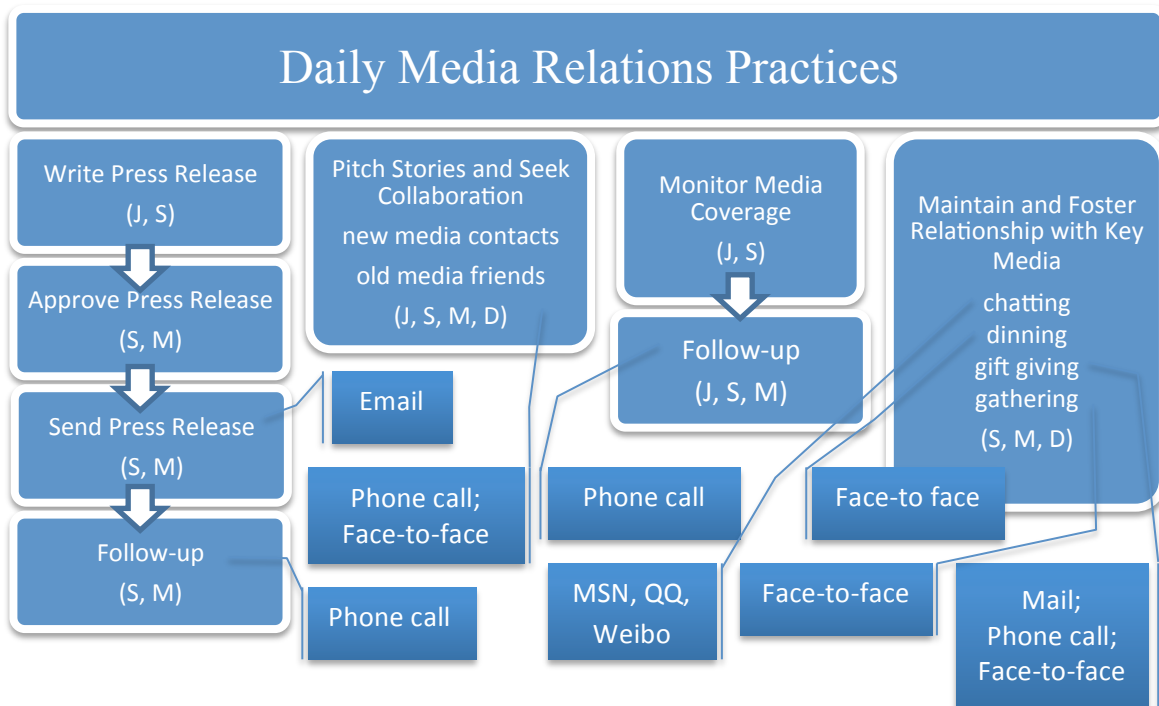
Figure 7. Preferences of Communication Channels

Figure 7 brings new insights on how daily media relations practices are carried out. The previous research in the field argues that the Chinese practitioners and journalists prefer off-line communications rather than on-line communications (Wu, 2011). The finding from this study corresponds to the previous research with the only exception that random conversations and daily chats between PR practitioners and journalists often take place online. The findings suggest that the PR practitioners prefer to use online communications such as MSN by Microsoft and QQ by Tencent when they are looking to make random conversations with the journalists for networking purposes. During the past two years, the rise of Weibo, which is a similar concept as the Twitter in the West, has become another popular online communication medium in media relations.

In contrast to the West, blogging is less popular in China. Instead of what is suggested by Murray (2009) to constructively comment on blogger's posts to foster relationship, in China, this practice would actually mean actively interacting with the journalists through their Weibo posts. Larsson (2009) points out that email exchange is the most common online communications between PR practitioners and the journalists in the Nordic. In the case of Mainland China though, interactions between the PR practitioners and the journalists often take place through online chatting while email exchanges are only used for sending information and materials to the other party. This choice of medium could perhaps be explained by the fact that online chatting allows more personal and conversational interactions to take place. Thus, it is preferred in Chinese media relations where the relationship between the practitioner and the journalist is closer and more personal.

In addition, the research conducted in this thesis shows that although online communications is used to communicate with the media on a daily basis, off-line communications are essential for communicating urgent and important issues. As mentioned in the literature review, the communication context is meaningful to parties who are communicating in a high context society. The findings from this thesis research correspond with the literature review, and further deduct that the communications medium

will reflect the importance and urgency of the message, as well as conveying implicit gestures of showing respect or politeness. This inference is not mentioned in any literature references regarding media relations, but it does relate logically to the high context culture. According to the interview participants, using an off-line medium would signal to the other party that the matter is important or urgent, and in some circumstances it is also more polite.

Participant B implies that the significance assigned to off-line communications may be a result of Chinese culture and the way of doing things in the past. Participant D prompts, "*If it is important, we would need to call or meet face-to-face.*" Participant B explains, "*When dealing with traditional Chinese corporations and government entities, you have to pick up the phone and call to the person after sending a letter or email to him, otherwise it is considered impolite and they will ignore it.*" In the light of Participant C, the point of the phone call is so that the other party does not need to write back or respond back. Moreover, it is the polite way to do by taking the initiative to get the response. Participant D and Participant E also affirm that making a phone call after sending out an email shows sincerity and respect to the other party[6]. Therefore, it is understandable that the same practice exists in media relations. For instance, the PR practitioners should always call to the journalists after sending a press release to them if they want it to look important and show politeness at the same time.

While online communications and phone calls are enough for carrying out daily media relations practices, but face-to-face communication appear to be the most vital in relationship building that cannot be left out. Wu (2011) also stresses the importance of face-to-face communication in relationship building, however, the article does not specify when and how frequently face-to-face meetings should take place. The findings in this thesis suggest that face-to-face communication does not need to take place on a frequent basis, nor is there a time restraint on when the PR practitioner should began to have the face-to-face communication with the journalist.

As Participant B puts it, *"This [the need to meet face-to-face] is just like dating, you can date online without meeting face-to-face, but eventually you will need to meet the other party if you are thinking about marriage."* Participant C elaborates, *"In China, we are attached to meeting people in person, it feels different if you have never met the other party comparing to the case where you have met each other."* Participant C even jokes, *"As long as you buy them [the media] lunch or dinner, they will always have time."*

Participant D, who shares the same opinion with Participant B and C, urges, *"You cannot build great relationship merely through phones calls and emails. Face-to-face meeting is important. In China, it is all about interpersonal communications. What is interpersonal? It is face-to-face."* Participant D even uses this interview as an example and puts forth that if this interview is conducted through phone call, it is unlikely to generate satisfying answers, which in his view can only be obtained from a face-to-face interview. That is how important face-to-face communication can be in China. Indeed, face-to-face communication does facilitate a personal interaction that will generate a more insightful conversation compared to other mediums, especially in the Chinese culture.

Finally, there are three main points to be remembered from this subsection regarding communications in media relations. Firstly, even though face-to-face communication proves to be critical in relationship building, however, it does not need to happen on a frequent basis. Instead, the IT journalists are also comfortable with online communications that may take place on a daily basis. Secondly, depending on the nature of the issue, as well as the urgency and importance of the message, off-line communications such as phone calls or face-to-face meetings should always be used in addition to online communications. An email followed by a phone call is considered to be polite and respectful which also indicate to the other party that the matter is urgent or important. In other words, it is not enough to merely state in the heading or body of the email that the matter is important or urgent, because the recipient would assume if it is truly important or urgent the sender would have picked up the phone and called to confirm. Thirdly, it is logical to infer that online

communications may serve the purposes of maintaining and strengthening a relationship, but off-line communications are essential when an issue or a need arises. From the observation, PR practitioners often have chitchat with the journalists through online communications such as MSN, QQ and Weibo posts, but they rarely call a media just to chitchat. When a PR practitioner picks up the phone and calls to the media, there is always a matter to be discussed.

5.1.3 <u>Six ways to identify key media partners</u>

This subsection further explains the right side box in Figure 6, which describes that maintaining and fostering relationship with key media is an important component of the daily media relations practices. This subsection will discuss how to identify the key media. Finding the most important media and separating them from less important ones are critical in media relations since it will help the PR practitioner to reach the target audiences and achieve the PR goals more effectively. The findings from this thesis corresponds with Larsson (2009) that the media exert different degree of influence and are not equally important to PR practitioners. It is also consistent with Jiang (2007), who put forth that PR practitioners should be tactically selective of the media to disseminate information. Figure 8 summarizes and proposes six ways to effectively determine the importance of a medium on the basis of interview and observation conducted in this thesis. The six ways are explained and elaborated below in detail.
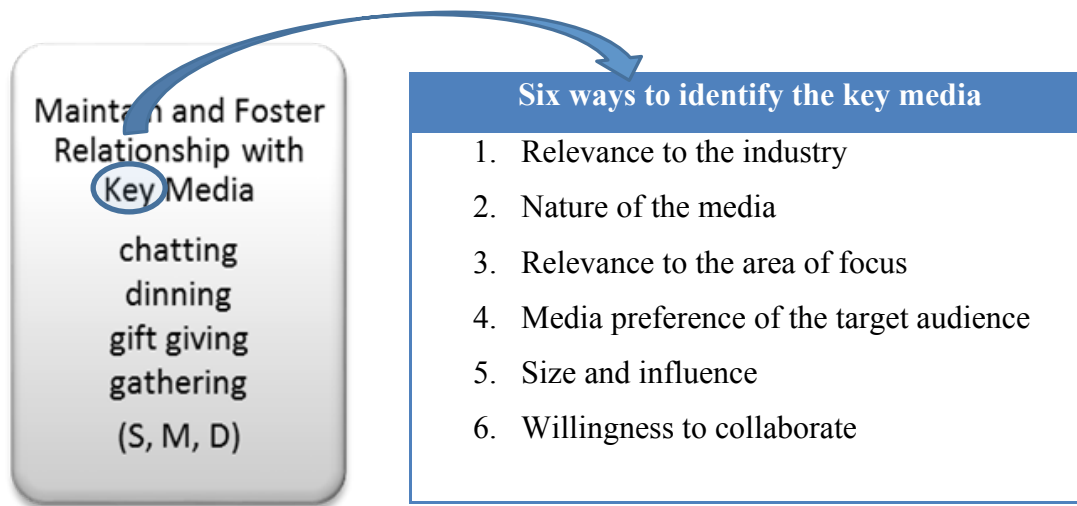
Figure 8. Six Ways to Identify Key Media Partners

1. Relevance to the industry: The media that are most relevant and influential to one's industry are obviously more important. Thus, media are prioritized differently depending on the industry of the client that the PR practitioner works for. "*If your client is in the IT industry, then of course IT media are the most important for you.*" (Participant D)

2. Nature of the media: The importance of a medium can also be associated with its nature, the different types include: online, print, television and radio broadcast. The four participants working in the IT industry all agree that their main focuses are the online and print media. Among the online media, portal sites are the main targets. The four largest portal sites in China are Sina, Sohu, NetEase and Tencent. The second important are the vertical media, which are specialized IT websites such as Yesky, IT168 and Zhongguancun Online. The media that they are least concerned are the radio broadcasts. This is opposite to the Nordic countries, where the most important media are some of the largest radio station, television stations, and national newspapers (Larsson 2009, p. 134).

3. Relevance to the area of focus: PR professionals are often responsible for different aspects of public relations, which is especially true if they are working for a large

corporation. The focus that is assigned to the PR practitioner determines the importance of a media. Participant B who is concentrating PR on the corporate branding aspect of her client put forth that business media such as *China Business News*, *21ˢᵗ Century Business Herald*, *China Daily*, and *People's Daily* are the most crucial. Meanwhile, Participant C who is in the same industry as Participant B but focus on the technology leadership aspect asserts that media such as *Science and Technology Daily* and *China Electronics News* are important. In addition to the corporate branding and the technology leadership, there are also other focuses including product branding, corporate social responsibilities and government affairs[7].

4. Media preference of the target audience: Participant D explains that the choice of medium often depends on the target audience. He advises the PR practitioner to first identify the target audience, and then find out which medium the target audience is in frequent contact with, and lastly use that medium to reach the audience[8]. For example, in China, the youngsters prefer online media whereas the elderly prefer television and traditional media.

5. Size and influence: The smaller media are less important than the larger and well-known media. Participant C comments, "*For corporate public relations, large and well-known media are especially important.*" Participant B even puts it directly, "*The small media are not that important. They are often invited and used to make the numbers meet (the client required number of media attendance).*"

6. Willingness to collaborate: Participants B and Participant C find that the most critical media are the ones who are willing to collaborate and publish releases for them. "*The most important media are the ones who can write press releases for us and publish the releases, and also the ones who are willing to do in-depth stories.*" (Participant B and Participant C)

The above six ways may overlap with each other and the best result will be obtained by using them collectively to determine the importance of a medium. The following example

sets a good demonstration on combining multiple ways to work out the order of importance. Participant E works for IT clients and his focus is product and event oriented. The online media is the core media in the view of Participant E. Among the online media, portal sites are the main targets. According to Participant E, print media is also important because they are complements to the online media. However, because his area of focus is product and event oriented, which is fast paced and dynamic that requires the updates to be released in a timely manner, therefore, online media is more suitable than print media. Participant E explains, "*We put more emphasize to online media, because they are more powerful and reach a wider range of audience. Print media has some limitations, since many of them publish issues on a monthly or periodical basis. Consequently, the information provided to them is often published in the next issue, which isn't as timely as the online media*" This last statement shows that the nature of the medium is also important, which is not only relevant to audience preference but also affects speed of dissemination and accessibility.

To conclude, this subsection has identified six ways to determine the key media partners for a PR practitioner or a PR team. These six factors should be taken into account collectively otherwise the conclusion may be partial. This finding also suggests that different PR practitioners will find different media to be important, and it is unlikely to be generalizable. Therefore, the most important media identified by Larsson (2009, p. 134) can only be viewed as factual for the respondents in Larsson's research but not for all the PR practitioners in the Nordic. Now that the key media partner can be identified, the next subsection will discuss how to pitch stories and collaborate with these media partners, as well as how to establish a connection with new media partners.

5.1.4   Establishing media contacts

This subsection will further discuss the second to left box in Figure 6 on how to pitch stories and seek collaborations from the media. It will describe the process as well as some practical advices on how to ensure a successful collaboration. It will focus mainly on describing the process of establishing a new contact since it is more complex than seeking

collaboration from already connected media. Establishing contact with a new journalist also requires more time and inputs from the PR practitioners, and it is an inevitable part of media relations. Therefore, by understanding the process of pitching stories and seeking collaboration from the media, especially with new media contacts, a more comprehensive answer can be formed for answering the first research question. The below Figure 9 pictures the process of developing a new media contact. This subsection will explain and elaborate Figure 8 in a detailed manner.
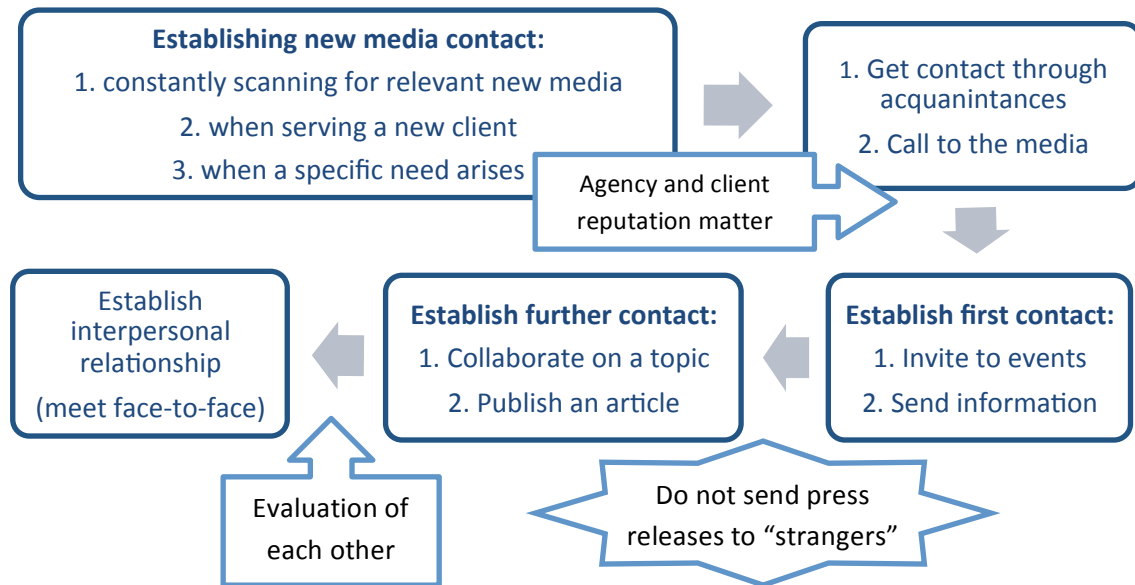
Figure 9. Developing a New Media Contact

According to Participant C and Participant E, the first step to acquiring a new connection is to know when to look for them. PR practitioners constantly scan for new media or publications that enter into the industry, and who are relevant for their clients[9]. Also, when PR professionals began to serve a new client, they will investigate and list all the relevant media that they need[10]. After they establish the need to get in touch with a new media, they tend to acquire the contact information or the reference to a particular journalist or editor from acquaintances such as friends in the media circle and colleagues at work[11]. In addition

from acquiring the contact from acquaintances, PR practitioners may also ask from agency colleagues and clients themselves if they happen to have the media contact in question[12]. In cases where a PR practitioner cannot find anybody who already has the connection to the particular medium then he or she will simply call there and ask to speak with the chief editor or the journalist responsible for the topic in question[13].

An interesting finding that is emphasized by three participants in association with establishing first contact with the media is the fact that the brand of the agency and the reputation of the client matter a great deal[14]. Participants reveal that they sometimes use the brand of Ogilvy and the well-known reputation of their client as a way to get in touch with the media and to establish credibility at the beginning[15]. The importance of the brand of the PR agency and the reputation of the client is not limited to easier access to the media. Moreover, the research conducted in this thesis shows that they also favor the dissemination of information[16]. Participant E explains that large IT corporations such as Microsoft, Intel and Dell often have several teams of PR professionals working for them to maintain media relations. Therefore, even though one team has no connection to a certain media, the other teams might be maintaining that relation.

In addition to the significance of the PR agency brand and client reputation when seeking collaboration and pitching stories to the media, as a rule of thumb, the participants also advice not to send press releases or disseminate information through media that the PR professional has not been in contact before. First of all, the participants believe that these media will not publish the press releases anyway[17]. Second of all, they are uncertain how these media will then respond and use the information, which may even have a negative impact[18]. As a result, Participant E prompts PR practitioners to always contact the unfamiliar media before sending the press release in order to establish a relationship or at least let the other party know what is needed; otherwise it is considered impolite and unprofessional[19].

Even though this finding is consistent with the literature review that PR practitioners in East Asia should always form a relationship with the journalists before sending press releases to them (Wu, 2011, p.12), it is still a somewhat different practice from the Western countries where personal connection to the media is less emphasized. It is perfectly common for PR practitioners to pitch stories and send press releases to the media that they have no previous dealings with. The journalists and editors will decide, based on the content of the story rather than the connection to the PR people, whether or not to publish them. Participant A offers a universally applicable advice when pitching stories and seeking collaboration from the media, which is to step into the shoes of the readers. In the words of Participant A, "*I sometimes call up a journalist and say I have something that would be very interesting to your readers. Journalists are writing for their constituencies, so you got to give them something that's interesting to their readers.*"

Going back to Figure 8, which shows that inviting the media to events and sending them information regarding the client's corporation and products, are good ways to establish first contact. Participant D proposes a smart tactic to get a media to attend an event by utilizing an aspect of the Chinese culture. "*When you invite the journalist to your event that he is not interested in, he usually turns you down for the first two or three times, however, on the fourth time he might feel embarrassed to turn you down. Then he accepts your invitation on the fourth time. If he feels that he gains something in value for attending the event, then the next time you invite him, he will come again. This becomes a relationship building process, and you can enhance the relationship further.*" An aspect of the Chinese culture, which is very similar with the Japanese culture, is that people find it hard and rather embarrassed to say no and turn down someone's kind offer for several times in a row.

Participant B and Participant E stress that a PR professional and a journalist should collaborate and work together for a few times in order to get an evaluation of each other before taking the relationship to a personal level[20]. The above is in conformity with the literature review that a long-term relationship should be established between PR

practitioners and journalists so that the journalists will know where the practitioners stand and trust can be instilled (Larsson, 2009, p. 138; Jiang, 2007). Finally, developing a personal relationship in media relations is inevitable in the Chinese context, which will be explored further under the next section.

5.2 The Intriguing Guanxi between the PR People and the Media

Relations and relationships play important roles in public relations and media relations as one can already tell from the appearances of the two terms which both entail the word "relations". The relationship between PR practitioners and journalists have been studied by various scholars including Larsson (2009), Scott (2007), Murray (2009), Jiang (2007), Sarusup and Kim (2004), Wu (2011), whose work have been mentioned in the literature review. The research by the former three scholars is focused on the practices in the Western society, whereas the latter ones investigate the practices in the Asian culture. The findings below will expand upon the previous research in the field regarding the relationship between the Chinese PR practitioners and the media. The first few paragraphs will explain the professional working relations whereas the latter part unearths the personal aspect of media relations. In general, this section will respond to the second research question.

The Chinese PR practitioners perceive their relations with the media to be mutual and collaborative. They view most media to be friendly. The participants believe that this mutual relationship is due to the fact that the media often share the same needs or the same goals as the PR agency, which enables collaboration[21]. The participants consider the relationship to be two-way, and while they use the media for disseminating information, the media also approach them for information on topics that they are working on[22]. This finding resembles the previous research in the area, which confirms the literature review that relationships between the PR practitioners and the journalists are in general friendlier in the Asian societies than in the Western societies.

The findings of the collaborative relationship and the two-way communications correspond to Jiang's (2007) research. In China, PR practitioners and journalists are often seen working on projects together. As Participant E puts it, "*a main part of my job is to ask the media if there is something that they need cooperation with, if we can collaborate together.*" The participants view themselves as a link that bonds together the media and the firm that they represent, and this bond facilitates a two-way information flow. "*We pass on our information to the media and collect their feedback and opinions regarding the corporation and pass it back to the client*" (Participant D). Participant C describes that gathering feedback from the media industry experts and passing it back to the PR managers in the client firm is a part of his daily job[23].

Due to the fact that the relationship between the PR professionals and the media is more collaborative and the media are less scrutinized towards the PR people, consequently, information subsidy becomes a common phenomenon in the Chinese media industry. Participant E argues, "*Media acts as a medium for information dissemination, but they also need sources and information. They might not have time and energy to gather the information about an industry, which is why it is usually provided by PR agencies. Most of them are glad that we contact them.*" According to Larsson (2009), only a minority of journalists in the Nordic countries feels confident in the information assembled by the PR practitioners. However, this is a popular phenomenon in China, which is in line with Chen and Culbertson (2003). The Chinese journalists appear to be extremely comfortable with the information provided by the PR practitioners[24]. The reliance on information subsidy does cause some ethical dilemma, which will be discussed in the following section.

The finding of this thesis research has discovered a mutual, collaborative and two-way relationship between the Chinese PR practitioners and the journalists, which is in accordance to the literature references. This finding partly answers the second research question, which asks about the existing relationship between PR practitioners and journalists. However, an important cultural aspect of Chinese media relations need to be

explored in order to fully answer the second research question, and that is the aspect of *guanxi*. It is being pointed out in the literature review that the Chinese *guanxi* resembles the personal influence model discovered in places such as Greece, India, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. As the literature review reveals, the personal influence model has an unethical implication, and *guanxi* occasionally entails the manipulation of relationship to one's favor. The following paragraphs will debate and expound, in the context of media relations, whether the interpersonal relationship between the PR practitioner and the journalists is being taken advantage of in an unethical and manipulative way or is it merely cultural differences on how this kind of relationship is understood and perceived.

First of all, it appears that the Chinese PR practitioners cannot avoid of having an interpersonal relationship that is *guanxi* with the journalists. Participant D argues that the relation in "media relations" has two aspects. The first aspect is the professional relationship. The second aspect is the personal relationship. In his viewpoint, good media relations need to achieve both aspects. He remarks, "*It's unrealistic for you to have a good personal relationship with the media without any professional dealings. However, if you only have professional dealings but do not have a personal relationship, especially in China, it will be also be difficult.*" This is in contrast to the West, where PR practitioners can have good access to the media even without any personal relationship with the journalists (Larsson, 2009).

However, the next question is whether this personal relationship is in anyway unethical or manipulative. To answer this question, one needs to fully understand this personal relationship first. Building *guanxi* involves dining and gift giving as indicated in the theoretical framework and by the interview participants[25]. Yet, none of the participants viewed this *guanxi* building to be a form of bribery or trying to influence the media to take their side[26]. This perspective is consistent with Wu (2011, p. 13), who also contends that giving journalists gifts and having informal gatherings are culturally acceptable in Asian

cultures. Meanwhile, inviting media to dinner and buying them gifts are phenomena in the industry that could be viewed as bribery in the Western society.

However, In the Chinese society, as pointed out by both Participant D and Participant E, the relationship between people is different, human sentiment (*renqing*) is stronger. Under the environment, gift giving and networking is a common practice. The Chinese word "*renqing*" is a unique and important aspect of Chinese culture. Just like the word *guanxi,* there is no equivalent translation for *renqing* in English either. The closest translation for the word in English is human sentiment. In the above statement, "renqing is strong" could be understood as saying that Chinese interact with other people at a more personal level and they are more sentimental.

Furthermore, it appears that having *guanxi* with the media does not sway the media to take on one's side. The majority of the media will stay impartial and objective when reporting an issue even though they have a great relationship with the PR people. Participant B justifies that this is because everybody is doing the same so in the end it does not make the behavior any special[27]. Participant E, having the same viewpoint as the rest of participants, asserts, "*These practices do not affect the impartiality of authoritative and large media, whether how much gifts one gives or expenses one covers. Because when the fixed truth is out there, no matter how much you give to the media, you cannot change the facts, especially with public problem-oriented and sensitive issues.*"

The media takes an impartial and professional stand especially during the reporting of a crisis or issue, and *guanxi* appears to be most powerless in these occasions. The only difference that *guanxi* brings to the table is for the journalists to give the PR people a heads up before publishing, and hear both sides of the story. Participant B gives a vivid illustration of how little *guanxi* helps during the crisis, "*The journalists who have good relations with us will let us know that they are going to publish it [the crisis]. It's like they are going to stab you, but they will let you know it before they stab you, and stab you in the*

front rather than in the back." Participant C judging from his experience points out that the large online portal sites are the toughest. They do not care about *guanxi* with the PR practitioners whereas only care about attracting readers and staying ahead of the competition[28].

In addition to the occasional polite notices from the media before printing about a crisis, some journalists will call to the PR practitioner who they have a good relationship with and hear their side of view for a comprehensive reporting[29]. Participant E explains and elaborates, "*When crisis or negative issues happen, journalists with good relationship with us tend to ask our opinion…this is because the only way that they can know the facts and acquire firsthand information is through our PR agency…Of course we will try to let the media write about something else than to report the negative, but media as a profession needs to be responsible for the audience and the public, so many media still print the story. For the media, firsthand information is extremely important. They will not care about saving our face. They have the rights to publish what they know or other media will do the same.*"

The above finding shows that during the reporting of a crisis or an issue, the Chinese media abide higher ethical standards than its neighboring countries, Japan and South Korea. According to Wu (2011), in these two countries, journalists are willing to soften or withhold negative news for PR practitioners whom they have a close relationship with. Even though having a personal relationship with the journalists does not offer much help during a crisis, however, PR practitioners in China still assign a great importance to relationship building due to other conveniences it may bring, such as being able to better get through to other parties.

Participant A, a Westerner PR practitioner in China, takes notice of the significance of *guanxi* as well, "*The most prominent is the relationship, the importance that Chinese put on relationship. When you are in the communications business, the basis of communication is*

to be able to have a little bit of relationship with someone so you can communicate with them your ideas, views and thoughts. So I think the way in which the media relation is handled, guanxi is very important." On the other hand, he suggests that not having a good relationship with the media does not necessarily deny the access to the media. In his viewpoint, "*Having a great story is part of building a relationship with journalists, is also important. Having a relationship is not about he is my old friend, but rather understanding of your need as a person and I'm going to try to deliver something that's of value to you.*"

It is interesting to observe from the interview how Chinese participants emphasizes having a relationship with the media is vital while Participant A, a Westerner, often put forth that understanding the needs of the media, of their readers, and the newsworthiness of the story is critical. This is somewhat in line with how previous studies regarding U.S. media relations would often stress the "technical" component of media relations such as good quality and objective content of press releases, and appropriate contact channels, to be vital for the success of media relations (Wu, 2011, p. 12). On the other hand, the Chinese interviewees clearly place relationship to be the most important. When the media refuse to cooperate, the first doubt that usually comes to their mind is the questioning of their relationship instead of whether the story is attractive enough. Participant C brings up in the interview, "*There is a journalist who hasn't published anything for us for 6 months. I don't know if it is because I haven't built a good relationship with him or my supervisor hasn't built a good relationship with him.*" It is interesting how he diagnoses the problem to be the relationship rather than the newsworthiness of the content.

Both Participant B and Participant C point out that even the multinationals have noticed the importance of relationship building in China. The PR managers in their client firm have recently pushed out a program which requires the PR professionals to dine on a monthly basis with journalists from two to three media on the key media buddy list. Participant D comments that the multinational clients have been increasingly influenced by the environment and will even suggest if they should buy something to give to the media.

However, he implies that the multinational corporations or foreign corporations are ethically better than the local ones when it comes to gift giving due to the difference in culture.

In the Chinese culture, personal relationship is often established and maintained through gift giving, which a Western practitioner will probably find it hard to understand. Yet, this is how relationship is formed in China. Finding the perfect gift seems to become a required skill or asset for PR professionals. As Participant B puts it, "*Gift giving is really a Chinese culture, it's hard to think of what to give nowadays, hard to guess what they [the media] like.*" The gift does not need to be expensive. Participant E buys gifts to media all the time but does not recall giving anything expensive to the media. The common gifts include gift cards and movie tickets, which could be given to the journalists during traditional holidays such as the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival.

One of the reasons why PR professionals working for multinational corporations do not give expensive gifts to the media is due to the policies and regulations in these corporations, not allowing the gift to exceed a certain amount of dollars. However, it has brought to attention during observation and unofficial chats outside the interview that although PR professionals in agency do not give expensive gifts to the media but they do seem to give expensive gifts to clients in order to secure their account and obtain their businesses. This will be discussed further under the next subsection on how unspoken rules prevail written policies and regulations in China.

The Chinese participants all agree that the intention of gift giving and establishing a personal relationship with the media is never to control the media or to bend the truth. It is more about having a better access to the media and having the media listen to the PR professional's viewpoints and side of the story. Giving gifts to the media might influence them just a little bit, but never significantly. Participant D even argues that one should never try to control the media[30]. According to the observation made during the internship

with Ogilvy, it is indeed true that giving inexpensive gifts to the media might allow easier access to the media indicating that some media might be willing to disseminate boring press release for the PR practitioner. However, as acknowledged by all the participants, the media will not hide or bend the truth for the practitioner even if they have a good relationship.

Moreover, in the opinion of Participant D[31], it is unfair to judge Chinese media in comparison to the Western media in the question of media standards and ethicalness since the context is totally different. Firstly, the Western society has no *renqing* (human sentiment), therefore, the Western media will do anything to expose and dig up newsworthy stories even at the expense of hurting others. Secondly, theoretical base is different just like traditional Chinese medicine cannot be compared to Western medicine since they have totally different systems. Thirdly, objective reporting is situational since each medium has its own viewpoints and represents different interest groups. For example, BBC and CNN news channels are influenced by political groups, and they do not necessarily serve the interest of the general public but rather the elite groups. From the perspective of the Chinese, BBC and CNN often make China look worse than it is or are selective on its reporting which often puts China in a negative light.

Participant A also takes the side of Chinese journalism believing it to be as good as Western journalism. "*The differences are based on the nuances really, great journalism is objective reporting. I don't think any country has a lack on that area. I think you need to be objective; you need to be free to report what you want to report. I don't think some Chinese journalists are given restrictions, [so] they are any less of a journalist than anybody else, and it's the nature of the environment. I think in every subject but politics they are often neutral and very good and very thorough. I'm not critical of Chinese journalism at all; I think in some spectrums they are very good reporters.*" Participant A's view indicates that although the Chinese media may be given some restrictions in the reporting of political affairs but in other areas they are often neutral and thorough. Participant A's secretary also comments that many journalists in China work hard to supply quality information to the

audience, and some Chinese media provide very investigative reports. She is convinced that there are common grounds between Western journalism and Chinese journalism.

Considering all the above viewpoints and arguments from the participants alongside with personal observation, it can be concluded that the relationship between the PR practitioner and the media is not being exploited in an unethical way. The conclusion drawn from the thesis research suggests that it would make the job of the PR practitioner easier indicating that it would be more convenient for them to disseminate information through the media, however, it does not deliver a decisive advantage. The media is not going to lie or hide the truth because of *guanxi* with the PR people. Moreover, the intention of establishing *guanxi* with the media is never to control them or alter the facts, nor it is to gain special favors or influence the impartiality of the media, but it is rather to ensure that the media will disseminate information for them and hear their side of views.

Finally, in response to the second research question, it can be summarized that the professional working relationship between the PR practitioner and the journalist is mutual and collaborative, and the media tend to rely on the information provided by the PR practitioners. Meanwhile in the Western countries, there is a rather uneasy alliance between the PR practitioners and the journalists, where the media are distrustful towards the information assembled by the PR professionals. Furthermore, in addition to the professional relationship, the Chinese practitioners often have a personal relationship with the journalists in the form of *guanxi*. This relationship has being studied in previous research as well, however as noted earlier, there is a research gap regarding the actual conveniences that *guanxi* may bring to a PR practitioner in Mainland China. This section argues and concludes that this personal relationship does not appear to have an unethical implication in the Chinese context.

5.3 The Practice of Media Relations in China in Relation to its Culture

The findings presented in this section will unveil two common media relations practices that are neglected by previous researchers. This section is divided into four subsections. The first subsection discusses the prominence of unspoken rules and hidden practices that often prevail written policies and regulations. Although previous researchers in the field have also discovered this cultural phenomenon, however, the discussions in this section include some real-life examples, which will generate additional insights. The second and third subsection will present two common practices in media relations and public relations, which only exist in the Chinese PR and media industry. These two practices are only briefly mentioned in previous research. The last subsection will argue that the Chinese culture is deeply rooted in the practice of public relations and media relations from every aspect. Overall, this section contributes to answering the third research question, which asks about the cultural impact on media relations.

5.3.1   Unspoken rules prevail written guidelines

The finding of unspoken rules often prevail written guidelines corresponds and relates to two aspects of culture discussed in the literature review. The first is the high context nature of the Chinese society, and the second being the low uncertainty avoidance. As noted under the literature review, there is limited research on how the low uncertainty avoidance dimension affects media relations practices in Mainland China. Finding from the thesis research draws a connection between the low uncertainty avoidance with the phenomenon of unspoken rules prevails written guideline in media relations. This connection will be explained in detail under this subsection.

This finding can be best illustrated through examining the issue of professional code of conduct that came up in the interview. Participant A, the President of Ogilvy PR in North Asia, highlights the fact that they have code of ethics at work place. His secretary who accompanies him during the interview adds, "*We have very strict guidelines when it comes*

to dealing with the media. About code of conduct, of course there is, and has to be complied. Every profession has its professional code of conduct. The industry has its standards and the agency has its own policies as well." According to Participant A and his secretary, all agency employees need to undergo media training before dealing with the media. This media training includes guidelines on what can be disclosed to the media and what should be kept confidential, for instance, company financial statement is information that cannot be disclosed before its release.

This code of conduct and guideline at work is very detailed and thorough as Participants from the interview all agreed that they have seen it and even studied for it[32]. Yet, what is unfortunate is the fact that the participants claim that they do not remember much of it afterwards, and view it merely as a procedure[33]. It even took a while for the participants to recall where the code of conduct can be accessed. According to the participants, there is no hardcopy of the guideline, but they can go back to review the online course that they had completed in order to review it. The secretary of Participant A puts forth, *"We don't put it (professional code of conduct) on our desks, because for Chinese, we only look at policies when there is a need. There is a file in the computer, but not really a hard copy one that we would keep with us on the desk."* This comment partly explains why participants do not remember much about it since one would only look at it when there is a need such as when an issue arises or before taking an exam.

As a result, it can be assumed that although the agency does provide opportunities for employees to learn and follow the professional code of conduct, but yet, it does not have the policies in place to enforce the compliance. The fact that the participants cannot remember much about the code of conduct and the management accepting the situation that employees only look at it when there is a need shows that the enforcement or the need to comply could be lacking. Participant B points out straightforwardly, *"There is no principle to tell you what you should do and should not do. There are guidelines or rules that is not spoken out aloud. Unspoken rules often prevail the existing guidelines."* Another example

to illustrate this aspect of culture would be that although there is the guideline and an upper limit on how much money one can spend on banqueting and gift giving, but unspoken rules in the industry often prevail, and company regulations are often ignored.

A close friend who works for a multinational automobile corporation brings to light in a conversation over dinner that almost everybody in her marketing department is taking somewhat expensive gifts from their vendors but it is a hidden practice that nobody admits openly. She constantly receives gifts from her vendors, from small items such as USB network adapters to more expensive items such as a camera on her birthday. She continues to state that there was one occasion where she had told her vendor that she is planning to buy a new iPhone, the vendor out of expectation went and bought her a new iPhone and gave it to her as a gift. She is aware that the corporate policy forbids them to take expensive gifts from vendors, but many employees do it under the table. She knows that her colleagues are taking expensive gifts from vendors but nobody is saying it aloud.

This is indeed an existing industry phenomenon although it sounds unbelievably corrupted. During a random conversation with another team in Ogilvy who serve clients from the automobile industry, a senior PR practitioner who the researcher has a good relationship with states that the monetary values of the birthday gifts that they give to clients are often based on the revenue or business that the client brings to the team. It is common for them to give iPhones and iPads to clients. Yet, according to Participant A, the President of Ogilvy PR in North Asia, there is company policy regulating the monetary value of the gift that a PR practitioner can give to the client or to the media.

It is an established fact that expensive gifts are given to clients even though corporate policy forbids such practice. Therefore, a logical explanation based on observation and conversations with the PR practitioners suggests that there is a loophole in accounting practices that would permit expensive gifts to be bookkept as a legitimate expense. The directors of each team is required to approve and sign for all the expenses, therefore, it is a

common practice in PR agencies for a team member to notify the director of the gift, and with the approval from the director, the practitioner will then file it under a legitimate expense instead of accounting it as an extravagant gift to the client. This way, PR professionals can get around the company policy. This is a typical example of how the Chinese often find ways to go around the rules and how hidden practices prevail the written guidelines.

It is true though that the gifts given to the media are inexpensive since the media do not generate direct revenues for the PR teams. As far as the research shows, the PR practitioners only give expensive gifts to clients who has the power to influence the allocation of big contracts that are worth up to millions of RMB to the team each year. Finally, it should be noted that the relationship between the PR practitioner and the client, by itself, is irrelevant to this study, whereas this is just an example to show how far and frequently the unspoken rules prevail existing guidelines in the PR industry.

The above findings exhibit the nature of a high context society. As discussed in the literature review that rules and regulations are less honored in high context societies, on the opposite side, personal relationships and situational factors often come first. Furthermore, people tend to be indirect, as well as unspoken rules and under-the-table dealings commonly exist. Just as Participant C adds in the interview that they sometimes send journalists books, and even give them dog food and cat food as gifts in the case when they have pets. He explains these choices of gifts with a Chinese proverb 投其所好, which means catering to the need of the other party. Participant B suggests that this is a part of the unspoken rules. Although there is no guideline or rule telling PR practitioners to send the media gifts, but the unspoken rules in the industry mandate that in order for PR practitioners to foster great relationship with the media, they will need to cater the needs of the other party in different ways.

Furthermore, the above findings somewhat confirms China's low score in uncertainty avoidance by linking how Chinese are comfortable with unspoken rules to the nation's low uncertainty avoidance. China's low score in uncertainty avoidance is totally opposite of its neighboring countries, and even lower than Western countries such as Finland and the United States. Due to the peculiar result, there seems to be limited analysis of public relations under this dimension. The above findings support and provide examples to better understand China's low score in uncertainty avoidance. Because the Chinese are comfortable with ambiguity and matters that are not expressed, therefore it makes sense that they are comfortable and willing to play by the unspoken rules. There is a famous Chinese proverb "只可意会，不可言传", in translation, "it is perceived rather than expressed". The proverb entails the meaning that some matters cannot be expressed or said out aloud; one has to discover and perceive it by oneself. This proverb proves to be utterly useful and true in the Chinese public relations industry.

5.3.2 Media allowance – a creation from the *Hongbao* culture?

Media allowance, also called transportation allowance, is a unique and common practice that, as far as the research shows, exists only in the Chinese media relations. Media allowance is a monetary benefit, often in the form of cash, paid out to the journalists when they attend an event or publish a press release for the PR people or a business. This subsection reveals a great amount of new facts and insights that have not been discovered and discussed in previous research. The limited research on this topic is perhaps due to the fact that PR practitioners are not proud of this practice therefore prefer to keep it quiet. Interviewees from previous studies have only briefly mentioned the practice, but it was never investigated thoroughly (Jiang, 2007). This subsection will describe the practice of media allowance in a detailed manner, and the possible effects it brings to professional journalism and objective reporting. Moreover, this subsection will try to uncover the origin and rationale behind such practice and whether culture has anything to do with its practice.

Participant A appears to be hesitant on this subject, he took small but frequent pauses to carefully word the responses when asked about his opinion regarding media allowance. This is completely understandable since it is indeed a sensitive issue especially for Participant A, who can be considered as a spokesperson for Ogilvy PR. It seems that he is taking a strong stand against giving media allowance to journalists even though he also implicitly expresses the helplessness in stopping such practice from taking place. He stresses several times that he does not want the money to be viewed as pay for coverage but as merely transportation reimbursements.

"We pay a very nominal amount so that they would come to the press conferences but we don't position it as pay for coverage and things like that. That is not our style. The reason that it exists is that we want the journalists to turn up in the press conferences, but they won't come because they won't get their transportation reimbursed. ……. We don't necessarily like doing it, but we do it because we want them to hear the story. I hope that the money that we pay is the money to bring them out to the press conference, but that's not the money for coverage. ……. I hope it ends. I don't like to do it."

Although practitioners like Participant A would want to think of the media allowance, so called transportation allowance, as reimbursement for the travel expenses in order to perhaps justify the reasons and feel better about it, but it is clearly mistaken[34]. The fact is that most news agencies do cover the transportation expenses of their employees. According to Participant C, *"The use of this money [media allowance] is to cover the transportation for the media who attend the event. But the funny thing is, many media nowadays will cover their journalists' travel expenses."* Participant E also acknowledges this fact by reporting that the media allowances are often an extra income for the journalists or his news agency[35]. He asserts that even though the distribution and the spending of media allowance are uncertain but it is a fact that the money is not used to pay for the transportation.

According to Participant E, the amount of media allowance may slightly differ depending on which type of media best match the needs of the client. For instance, if there is an event that would need the reporting of CCTV (China Central TV) the most then they are willing to pay them more[36]. On the other hand, Participant C, who has being extremely forthcoming in the interview, gives a detailed quote. "*Press conference without private interviews is 200 RMB (25 euro), with private interview is 300 RMB (38 euro). A whole day event that needs a journalist to travel to another city from his work location is 400 RMB (50 euro). However, this amount may vary, especially in the case of local Chinese corporations and PR agencies. They tend to pay a bit more, about 800 RMB (100 euro). TV stations are 1000 RMB (125 euro). We also give to the cameraman. If it is a small event we usually just give one per media, if it's a large event then we give to each individual who comes to the event.*" These sums are a large amount of money compared to the average monthly salary of 4000 RMB (500 euro) in China.

All of the Chinese participants consider this practice to be a custom. It is a way that things are[37]. Participant C even exclaims, "*This is not the way in the West?*" Participant B puts forth that there are only exceptional few Chinese journalists who do not demand media allowance nevertheless they will take it if it is offered to them. Moreover, it is often true that journalists will not attend an event or publish an article if they are not given media allowance[38]. However, media allowance does not guarantee coverage. This means that even after taking the media allowance, some journalists may still choose not to publish anything. Participant C states, "*Whether they [journalists] publish the article or not does not depend on whether they receive the media allowance or not.*" Participant B agrees, "*Some media doesn't publish even receiving media allowance, but the journalists that we deal with are so familiar that they will usually publish the articles.*"

The Chinese participants are in consensus that they are never able to force the journalists to publish an article[39]. What they can do is to always follow up after paying the media allowance and request the journalists to publish in a timely fashion. In cases where

journalists insist not to publish the article, then the only thing that a PR practitioner can do is to find out the reason behind it and/or not to invite the journalist for the next time. Participant B and Participant C comment that their team tends to forgive the senior journalists and those journalists who they are familiar with, for once or twice, if they forget to publish or choose not to publish. However, if it is a junior reporter or a new comer, then they will not invite him for the next time if he does not publish the article. They conclude, *"The important thing is that we need to find out why they don't publish it, and know the reason behind it."*

According to the participants, in China, taking media allowance does not correlate with journalists' professionalism. According to the participants, professional journalists in the Chinese media are those who are knowledgeable of the industry and who have distinctive viewpoints[40]. Journalists can receive media allowance and be professional and objective at the same time. This is mainly because the journalists have the freedom to decide what to write. Participant C discloses, *"There are a few media who take our media allowance and write negative press releases, but we still need to invite them back next time, because they are important media and senior journalists who are well known in the circle."* Participant B and Participant C point out that truthful and sincere criticisms are actually appreciated from time to time[41]. In addition, Participant D remarks that the media also needs to have their own viewpoints, both good and bad, to attract readers and stay in business[42]. Therefore, paying media allowance does not necessarily ensure a positive coverage from the media.

On the other hand, although receiving media allowance does not necessarily indicate a journalist is unprofessional or unethical, not doing the job of good journalism is. According to the participants, it happens on a frequent basis in Chinese journalism that some journalists would take the media allowance, then copy and paste the exact press release written by the PR practitioner without even verifying or rewriting it. Participant B points out, *"There are some journalists who do not write anything. They just use the press releases sent to them instead. They will come to the event and ask directly for the press*

release, and print it accordingly." Participant C protests that some journalists are coming to an event with the sole purpose to get the media allowance. They leave immediately after receiving it and would tell the PR practitioners to send them the press release later for publishing[43].

At this stage, it can be concluded that even though media allowance is not only for covering transportation expenses, it cannot be exactly considered as pay for coverage either. This is because even when the journalists take media allowance they would still have the freedom to decide what to write and whether to publish or not. What is unethical and unprofessional is that some journalists would take the media allowance and publish exactly according to the press release sent by the PR practitioner without their own contributions. Finally, media allowance can perhaps be considered as paying for a lunch with a journalist in the Western countries. Participant A states, "*When I was in the U.S. Part of the environment is if I invite someone out to have a conversation of a story, I would pay for the lunch. I don't see it as anyhow different, but my expectation is [that] the journalists, I [would] want them to write about it but not that they will definitely write about it [the story].*"

The discovery and understanding of the media allowance partly answers the third research question, which asks the aspect of media relations practice influenced by the Chinese culture. The next step will be to identify the aspect of culture that resulted the practice of media allowance. None of the Chinese participants are conclusive of how the media allowance got started in the first place. Participant B suggests since the concept of public relations came from the West, so it might have been started by a Western agency in China. However, Participant C argues, although the concept is from the West, but it evolved in China and received influence from local enterprises. Participant C believes that the local privately owned enterprises often do not possess the correct mindset for public relations, so media allowance might be something that they started to give out to the journalists. Finally, both participants propose that it might be wise to ask Participant A, who is originally from the United States and who has worked in the industry for twenty years.

In the light of Participant A, *"It [media allowance] originally began because a lot of the newspapers and television stations didn't pay for the transportation. In order for the company to get them to come we had to pay a transportation allowance."* Participant E somewhat concurs with Participant A, he reflects that although unsure of how the practice got started, but he guesses that it was originally meant for covering the travel expenses of the media. He continues, *"As time passes by, media would compare with each other. It's a cultural element that Chinese like to compare with their neighbors, so if some have received travel coverage then others will want it as well. Therefore, it eventually becomes a Hongbao to the media."*

All the Chinese participants suspects that media allowance derives from the *Hongbao* culture. *Hongbao*, translated in English as the red envelope or red packet, is a monetary gift, which is given during holidays or special occasions. Participant C discloses that it is a Chinese tradition to show appreciation often in the form of *Hongbao* when someone does him or her a favor[44]. Participant B explains that during ancient times messengers are often given *Hongbao* when requested to deliver important letters[45]. This tradition has continued till nowadays and still exists in some industries. For example, in the modern day healthcare industry, patients still give *Hongbao* to the doctors and surgeons before surgeries[46]. According to the participants, depending on the circumstance, *Hongbao* can be viewed as giving a tip, paying a service fee or paying a commission[47]. Consequently, the Chinese are perfectly comfortable with such practice due to the fact that it is deeply rooted in the tradition and culture.

Participant D credits the existence of the *Hongbao* culture to scarcity of resource[48]. In the term of economics, media allowance is taking place because the demand for coverage exceeds the supply of media spaces. In other words, media has limited pages whereas the corporations who want to gain access to it are overwhelming. As a result, some media even have their own quoted price for attending an event and publishing an article, as described by Participant E, *"...they [some media] will not come if you do not give them that amount."*

This is especially true when it is promotional or advertorial events without much news value. However, the mere existence of the situation does not naturally lead to media allowance but rather it is due to how the Chinese are accustomed to compete or gain access to scarce resources, which leads to the practice of media allowance. As Participant D suggests, the Chinese are accustomed to give benefits in the form of *Hongbao* when seeking access to resources or favors from another party[49].

Finally, to sum up the findings, media allowance also called transportation allowance is not actually for covering journalists' transportation costs. It is a monetary benefit or an extra earning that the journalist or its news agency can spend at his or her will. However, media allowance is also not the same thing as paying for coverage because the journalists have the freedom to write what they want and decide whether to publish it or not. The PR professionals give media allowance to the journalists because it is often the only way to get them to attend an event or publish an article for them. It is a cultural phenomenon likely to be influenced by the *Hongbao* culture since similar practice can be found in other professions as well such as the between patients and doctors. Another explanation for the media allowance may be that the Chinese society is based on *guanxi* and *renqing*[50], which implies that media allowance is an exchange of favors due to *reciprocity* as discussed in the literature review by Hackley and Dong (2001).

This subsection answers the third research question by arguing that the *hongbao* culture, and a society based on *guanxi* and *renqing*, have led to the practice of media allowance, a unique media relations practice rooted in the Chinese culture. Different individuals may have different opinions regarding whether taking media allowance is professional and ethical. However, considering the industry environment and the context, the Chinese participants contend that this practice should not be condemned unethical or unprofessional because the intention is never to influence media's partiality and objectivity but rather it is following the common practice of the industry.

5.3.3 Advertorial or objective reporting, which one is it?

This subsection will discuss the Chinese soft article as another cultural specific media relations practice influenced by the high context culture and the low uncertainty avoidance. Soft article has remained veiled, and has not being discussed in any of the previous research. The lack of research is perhaps due to the fact that on the surface soft article appears to resemble the advertorial in the West. Yet, the soft article in China is fundamentally different from an advertorial in the Western countries. This subsection will first elaborate the differences; then it will put forth the implication of soft article in media relations; and it will lastly justify the reason of this practice in relation to the Chinese culture. This subsection will contribute to answering the third research question.

An advertorial resembles an advertisement but is in the form of an editorial that is designed to appear as an objective article or news story. In developed countries, it is often required by the law for the advertiser or the publisher to notify the readers of the advertorials, for example through the use of disclaimers stating the word "advertisement". In United Kingdom, just like many other Western societies, it is required by law to clearly mark advertorials as such. "*The UK's Advertising Standards Authority has reminded publishers that sponsored columns, published in exchange for payment and with content provided by marketers rather than publishers, must be clearly labelled as advertising.*" (Pinsent Masons, 2013) Some Western multinationals, such as Nokia, require its employees to identify themselves as an employee of the company when promoting corporate products through blog posts or other channels. It is indeed an ethical conduct that will avoid misleading the readers.

In China though, the above cases are just the opposites, where the advertorials are published under the name of journalists and disguised as a legitimate article. According to the participants, soft article is similar to buying a page or spot from the media, it looks similar to the articles written by the media with the only difference being it is paid. Participant C reveals, *"Different media charge differently. Some well-known media may*

charge around 6000 RMB (750 euro) for a section. You have to write it yourself, soft article is something that you write and send to the press, and pay for print." In addition, Participant D adds, in his viewpoint, the news value of a soft article is limited, writing and publishing such article is not a must considering its lack of news value. Also, one needs to pay a certain amount of "advertising fee" to get it published.

Participants underline that the requirement and the frequency of writing a soft article often depend on the need and requirement of the client. For example, some clients prefer soft articles and some prefer organizing events[51]. The client will usually assign a few key words and a direction for writing soft articles. According to Participant E, the most common types are a full-length article (长篇稿) and an in-depth article (深度稿). For example, a corporate social responsibility related article that discusses in detail about being a corporate citizen is an example of an in-depth article. The articles indirectly injects positive images of the corporation to the readers through e.g. fostering a deeper understand of a matter[52]. They are often written with the reader's perspective and preferences in mind, therefore, more appealing to the readers[53]. Participant E elaborates that a soft article does not irritate the readers as traditional advertising do. It needs to be interesting since the readers can easily move on to another article[54].

In China, the impact and amount of published soft articles can never be underestimated. Participant E claims[55] that soft articles were such a popular phenomenon during the past decade that a major component of the articles published by the media are composed of soft articles. As a result, the number of soft articles published has somewhat decreased nowadays because the readers are eventually tired of reading this form of article every single day. Participant E considers this to be a good sign for the industry since new ideas and approaches to reach the target audiences can now be developed. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the Chinese participants report that they have written soft articles before. They implicitly suggest that there is rarely a PR practitioner who has not. Furthermore, it is extremely common for soft articles to appear in information media, which supply

information sought by the consumer, for example evaluation of a computer or test-drive report of a car.

In the opinions of the Chinese participants, the reason that the media welcome soft articles openly is because of their pressure to sell advertisement spaces and their struggle to survive. Participant D[56] underlines that a major revenue stream for the media is from advertising. A majority of media cannot generate enough revenue from merely selling their publications. During earlier times, the news agencies are owned and financially supported by the government, whereas nowadays the commercial media are no longer owned and financed by the government. In order to compete in the free market environment and to stay in business, they need to generate additional revenue from advertisements and soft articles. Participant B and Participant C reveal that the media advertisement spaces in China are often bundled with public relations services[57]. The media are sometimes forced to cooperate because the corporations place advertisements with them and pay them handsomely for these advertisements, so if they refuse to cooperate, the corporations will take their businesses elsewhere[58]. Lastly, both Participant B and Participant C emphasize, *"The media is like a marketplace. The amount you pay determines the spot that you get."*

As can be concluded from above, the fundamental difference between a soft article in China and an advertorial in the West is that in China it is published under the name of the media or a journalist working for the media. Participant E states that they send soft articles to both online media and print media. When asked about whose name would appear on the paper, he answers, "*Usually this matter is taken care of by the editor, and will not use the name of the PR professional who wrote the article.*" Participant D frankly comments, "*All soft article is published in the name of the media. Otherwise it would be called advertising. Whether the reader can tell the difference by reading the text is the problem of the reader. The media, PR agency, or the corporation can all write the soft article, but the media delivers it.*" Consequently, it is fair to suggest that there is no advertorial in China, there is only advertisement or soft article.

It has been noticed from the interviews that the participants do not seem to see an ethical issue with the practice of soft article or be bothered by it. The Chinese participants even believe that it is the same way in the Western countries. The Chinese participants hardly recognize the difference that if the article is written by the corporation then it should be published under the corporation's name for example on the corporate website, blog or internal materials. The soft article in China is thus written by the corporation but published in the media, often under the name of a journalist who did not write the article. Participant A, who is aware of this situation in China, does not appear to be concerned about it because he believes that most readers can perhaps tell the difference. "*Advertorial also exists in the West but they specifically market it as advertorial, so here [in China] is not as, most people know, but it is not as called out as in the West.*" When it is asked that in the West if a company has written an advertorial, they should let the reader know, but in China it is not the way. He responds, *"That's right, it's not that obvious. I'm told that mostly readers know, but it's not that obvious."*

The participants do acknowledge that soft articles might be misleading after reminding them the fact that doing this might mislead the readers to think that the soft article is actually composed by the media and reflects the opinion of an impartial journalist. However, in the light of their judgment, they do not see a big problem with doing so. The fact that the Chinese PR practitioners do not find the soft articles to be disturbing could perhaps be attributed to three factors. The first is due to the harm that soft article may bring to the readers is so minor that it is easy to be neglected. The main goal of soft articles is often to establish a positive image for the corporation and its products, which does not necessarily bring evident harm to the readers.

Secondly, because the Chinese journalists already rely heavily on information subsidy that it makes the practice of soft article to appear acceptable. As pointed out earlier by several participants, some journalists do not even write their own articles, especially the junior ones. They instead would publish the exact press releases sent to them by the PR people.

Participant E comments, *"In China, the news articles are often the same, they copy from another media or use the one that the PR agent sends them."* This phenomenon is indeed commonly seen in the media industry, as also observed during the internship with Ogilvy, it is often the case that numerous online media would have the exact same article published on their website that is written by a PR practitioner.

Thirdly, due to its high context culture and low uncertainty avoidance, the Chinese are generally more comfortable with vague and implicit expressions and meanings. Therefore, the readers themselves probably do not see a problem with soft articles. They might not consider themselves being lied to or misled. It could perhaps be assumed that because the Chinese are used to pay attention to the underlying meanings rather than what is said in words, therefore in the Chinese culture, hidden agendas are likely to be acceptable and viewed as normal. Furthermore, Participant A could even be correct to assume that the Chinese are able to tell the differences between a soft article and a legitimate article just by reading it. However, this subject prompts further research in order to reach a conclusion whether the readers are indeed comfortable with soft articles or if they can tell the differences by reading them.

5.3.4   Chinese culture, rooted in media relations from every aspect

All the participants feel that the Chinese culture impacts the practice of public relations and media relations on a daily basis. However, they find it hard to define the most influential aspect of culture in public relations because they overlap with each other, and multiple aspects of Chinese culture can be applied to explain a practice or phenomenon. Participant E thinks that the Chinese culture is so profound and complex that it even entails some of the Western culture. Participant D adds that the Chinese culture is extremely situational so a great deal depend on the situation being present.

The participants, however, have reached one consensus. They all agree that relationship building is influenced enormously by the Chinese culture, and is likely to be the most

important and obvious aspect. Indeed, the study of *guanxi* in Chinese relationship has attracted attention from both Western and Chinese scholars, and there are countless research done on this topic. Moreover, many of the literature reviewed in this thesis has mentioned the concept of *guanxi,* e.g. Hackley and Dong (2001), Jiang (2007), Wu (2004; 2011), etc. It seems that the concept of *guanxi* can never stay unmentioned when studying public relations in China. All the Chinese participants consider having both a professional relationship and a personal relationship with the media to be necessary in the Chinese public relations[59]. None of them show discomfort or criticism towards *guanxi.* The participants[60] view their personal relationships with the media in a rather positive light instead of an obstacle of being professional even though Participant E admits that it is a double-edged sword, which has benefits and downsides.

Another influential aspect of Chinese culture concerning media relations that is closely related with *guanxi* is the concept of *renqing*. The concept of *renqing* has been explored in various research related to Chinese culture, but it is somewhat neglected in the research of Chinese public relations. Of course, this could be attributed to the limited research on Chinese public relations in general. According to the findings of this thesis, due to the collectivism and high context nature of the Chinese society that is based on *guanxi* and *renqing,* the Chinese are in general more emotional and sentimental. As a result, hidden practices often prevail existing rules and regulations. Moreover, the Chinese prefer indirect and implicit communications partly because they care about other people's feelings as well as the concern for saving *face*. These are all interrelated and are prominent aspects of the Chinese culture that impacts daily media relations practices.

Participant A also finds the interaction between the Chinese to be less direct than in the Western societies, which applies to media relations as well. People are concerned with saving face and the loss of face. *"…In the U.S., sometimes people [journalists] won't go to lunch with you, you just call up and say 'tell me what the story is', 'what you got', 'not interested'. In China, people will not do that much, but in the U.S. this is not offensive as*

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the way that people operate." However, Participant A believes relationships are built on trust and respect. The basis of good communications is to be open, honest, trustworthy and respectful to everybody. He is not too worried about the Chinese culture since the large cities in China are becoming more adaptable to the Western ways of operating.

In fact, the research of this thesis shows that the Chinese journalists are much more tolerant towards Western PR practitioners than their own. This can be observed from the fact that all the Chinese participants pay a great deal of attention to details in the Chinese culture when practicing media relations, while a Western practitioner can be less concerned about it. Participant E expresses even though Participant A has worked in China for twenty years, he is still not aware many of its cultural practices[61]. This is mostly because the area of responsibilities are usually different between a Western practitioner and a Chinese practitioner, for instance, Western practitioners are often in management positions who do not deal with daily operations such as handing out media allowances to journalists. Some Western practitioners never send gifts to their Chinese clients or journalists during holidays, yet, these clients and journalists do not complain. The reason that the Chinese journalists do not demand a Western practitioner to behave according to the Chinese customs is perhaps because they understand that Westerners are not familiar with the culture, so they do not find it offensive when they behave outside the cultural context and norms. However, the journalists do scrutinize and hold their Chinese counterparts to a higher standard.

In addition to the high context culture, *guanxi,* and *renqing,* there are numerous small daily practices in public relations impacted by the Chinese culture. Participant C points out that many practices of public relations have been localized. For example, the practice of giving journalists media allowance as well as how interactions and communications take place between PR practitioners and the media. Participant A conveys that the Chinese cultures do come into play in day to day media relations, how he invite the journalists to lunch and to press conferences, and the way that he invites them is influenced by the Chinese culture. Participant B points out that seniority plays an important role in the work place due to an

aspect of culture, Confucianism, which is similar to Japan. Years of employment in a news agency is often more important than competency. Furthermore, it can be summarized from the interviews that the perception of the appropriate behaviors during interaction with one another, what is deemed to be polite and respectful, as well as the personal relationship building through dinner invitations and gift giving are deeply influenced by the Chinese culture and traditions.

As a conclusion, it can be argued that the Chinese culture affects public relations and media relation profoundly. The most obvious aspects of culture are likely to be *guanxi* and *renqing*, as well as the high context nature, which entails indirectness and implicitness. However, just as the participants point out that the Chinese culture is profound and situational, therefore, individuals may understand aspects of culture differently based on his and her own experiences and the situation in question. Lastly, it should be clarified that the Chinese culture does not necessarily cause media relations practices to be unprofessional or unethical. The professionalism and ethical behavior among PR practitioners and journalists vary across individuals[62]. In addition, the participants believe that the journalists in the IT industry are in general more passionate, honest and ethical than other industries such as automobile, finance and real estate[63]. The conclusion chapter will be presented next.

6. CONCLUSION

The first section of this final Chapter will summarize the research findings and provide answers to the three research questions of this thesis. In addition, an updated theoretical framework based on the thesis research will be presented and discussed. The second section of this chapter will describe the implications and significance of this study in relation to previous research. It will point out both the theoretical implications and the practical implications. The last section will discuss the limitation of this study and provide suggestions on future research topics. It will also reflect on the research methodologies adopted and possible improvements for future research.

6.1 Research Summary

The objective of this thesis was to explore the impact that Chinese culture sets on media relations. The study was motivated by the general lack of research regarding the practice of public relations in Mainland China. The research methodologies adopted in this thesis are participant observation in a multinational PR agency and semi-structured interviews with five PR practitioners. Adopting these two methodologies together had unraveled hidden practices, fostered better understandings and generated practical insights regarding the daily practice of media relations.

Due to the fact that public relations consists of various functions, therefore, a certain focus was assigned by limiting the scope to media relations. In addition, this thesis had taken into account the previous research regarding global public relations, where various scholars have encouraged the study of public relations using one of the five contextual variables. Finally, a theoretical framework, Figure 5, was constructed based on the research questions and the literature review, which summarized and depicted the relevant core findings of previous research regarding the cultural impact on media relations in Mainland China. The findings of this study are concluded in Figure 10 and below preceded by the three research questions.

1. How is media relations carried out on a daily basis in Ogilvy & Mather?

Figure 6 provides a general overview of the daily media relations practices in Ogilvy & Mather, which derives from observation, interviews, and understandings from the literature review. The thesis research identifies the main daily media relations practices to be: (1) disseminate information in the form of press release; (2) pitch stories and collaborate with the media; (3) monitor media coverage; (4) and build relationship with key media. These tasks are divided among a team of PR practitioners where senior practitioners are often responsible for interacting with the key media and junior practitioners are responsible for assembling the information and interacting with the scattered online media. The importance of a medium can be assessed by collectively taking into account the six factors listed in Figure 8. The media relations practices are carried out through various communications medium both online and off-line. A detailed description of the process can be found in Figure 9, which examines the process of establishing contact and collaborating with the media.

2. What kind of relationship exists between the Chinese PR practitioners and the journalists? Has the Chinese culture impacted and shaped the relationship somehow in comparison to the Western countries (Nordic and the United States)?

The relationship between the Chinese PR practitioners and the journalists are collaborative and mutual while the alliances between their counterparts in the Western countries appear to be tremulous. The Chinese media rely heavily on information subsidy that is the information provided by the PR practitioners. On the other hand, the journalists in the Western countries are distrustful and scrutinize the information assembled by the PR practitioners. These differences in relationships can perhaps be explained by the *guanxi* and *renqing* aspects of the Chinese culture and society. The concept of *guanxi* and *renqing* are associated with the three principles of Confucius (*Li, Ren and Xiao*) and *reciprocity,* as researched by Hackely and Dong (2001). In addition, *guanxi* is also correlated with the

collectivism dimension and the long-term orientation dimension in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. As suggested earlier, many aspects of the Chinese culture are interrelated.

3. Which aspects of the Chinese culture have influenced the practice of media relations, and how?

The main impact that Chinese culture sets on media relations practices would be the differences in relationship building and the focus on personal relationship, which in turn affects how PR practitioners interact with the journalists. As could be concluded from Figure 6 and Figure 10 that networking with the key media is an important component of media relations practices. The aspects of Chinese culture that influence networking and relationship building are: *guanxi; renqing;* the three principles of Confucius; collectivism; and long-term orientation. These aspects of culture do overlap with each other.

Other main aspects of influential Chinese culture on media relations practices are high context culture which entails implicitness and indirectness, and low uncertainty avoidance. These aspects could partly explain why hidden practices often prevail written rules and regulations in media relations since Chinese are comfortable with implicit practices. It is also argued by the interview participants that China is a society based on *guanxi* and *renqing*, therefore, Chinese emphasize relations and reasoning over laws and regulations. Finally, the above aspects of culture alongside with the *Hongbao* culture have led to the practice of media allowance and soft article. The Chinese participants appear to be comfortable toward these practices, and cannot necessarily see the associated ethical dilemmas.

Figure 10 is drawn based on the findings of this thesis. It varies slightly from the theoretical framework (Fig. 5). The findings, in general, are consistent with the previous literature and theoretical framework. The theoretical framework developed in this thesis is based on a single case company. Therefore, it is encouraged for future researchers to further study, verify and extend this theoretical framework (Fig. 10) as well as the findings from this

thesis. The outcomes in Figure 10 all pose different degree of ethical issues. These associated ethical dilemmas have being explored and debated in this thesis. Finally, it is for the reader to decide whether it is fair to compare and judge these practices according to the media standards in the Western countries, and whether they jeopardize the principles of good journalism.
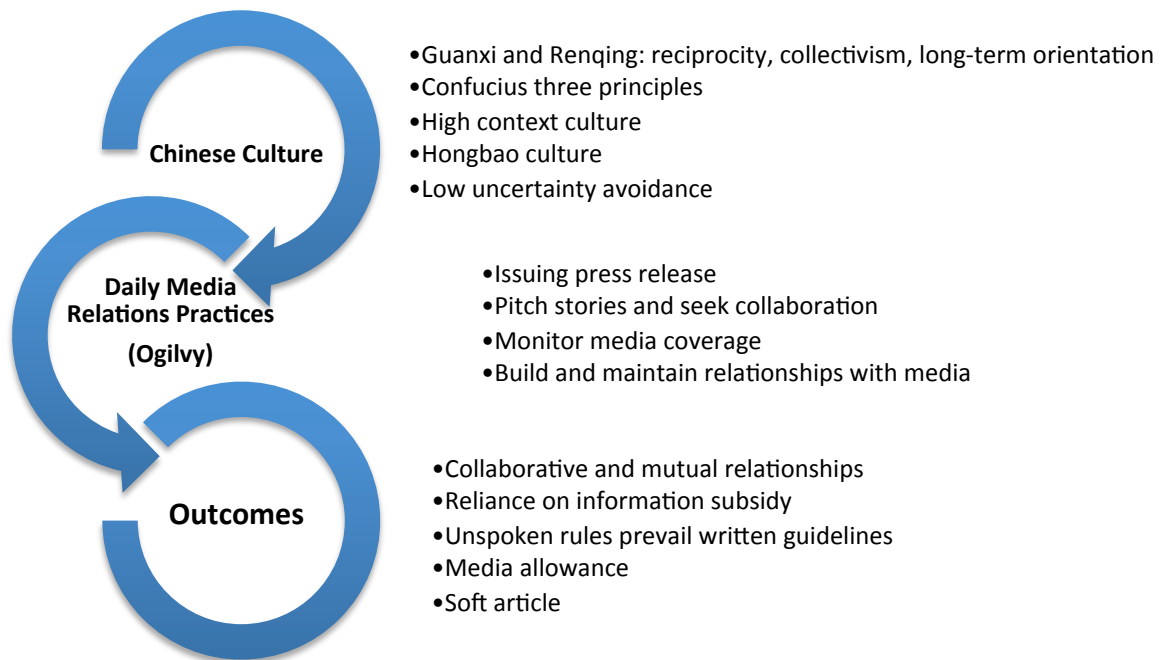

Chinese Culture
- Guanxi and Renqing: reciprocity, collectivism, long-term orientation
- Confucius three principles
- High context culture
- Hongbao culture
- Low uncertainty avoidance

Daily Media Relations Practices (Ogilvy)
- Issuing press release
- Pitch stories and seek collaboration
- Monitor media coverage
- Build and maintain relationships with media

Outcomes
- Collaborative and mutual relationships
- Reliance on information subsidy
- Unspoken rules prevail written guidelines
- Media allowance
- Soft article

Figure 10. Research Findings and Summary

6.2 Research Implications

This subsection will discuss the research implications alongside the previous literature. It will summarize the findings that correspond to the previous research as well as some of the findings that are in contrast. Furthermore, this subsection will explain and present the theoretical implications and practical implications of the thesis findings.

The research conducted in this thesis confirms *guanxi* to be a dominant aspect of culture that is influential to the practice of public relations in China. In addition, it is in agreement

with the previous research that a collaborative and mutual relationship exists between the Chinese PR practitioner and journalist. Wu (2011), Zhang, et al., (2009), Jiang (2007) all convey that *guanxi* is important in media relations because it foster cooperation. Yet, none of the articles concisely present to which extent *guanxi* can help a PR practitioner with the media. For example, in South Korea, having a personal relationship with the media can soften negative news or even prevent them from being reported (Wu 2011, p. 12). It makes one wonder if this is also the case in China due to similarities in culture. The research conducted in this thesis shows that *guanxi* does allow easier access to the media but cannot prevent negative coverage. Therefore, *guanxi* in media relations is important in the sense that it allows easier dissemination of information but it does not help PR practitioners to obtain unfair advantages such as hiding or alteration of facts for instance during crisis situations.

Another meaningful finding from this thesis is the unraveling of media allowance. Media allowance in the previous literature are merely viewed and called as cash payments or "red packets", which allegedly have corruptive and unethical implications. Wu (2011, p. 10) discloses that both the Taiwanese and the Westerners perceive the acceptance of cash to be an unethical conduct. Although the author does not specify whether this cash payment is media allowance, it can be assumed that it is since media allowance is the most common cash payments given to the journalists. The findings from this thesis argue that media allowance itself is rather transparent and does not necessarily have an unethical implication. This is because the intention of the media allowance is not to bribe or to influence the partiality of the journalists. It is rather a cultural courtesy similar to gift giving. Moreover, the journalists have the freedom to decide what to write and whether to publish or not even after receiving the media allowance. Hopefully, the findings from this thesis regarding media allowance will clarify a few misunderstandings and misinterpretations regarding the practice.

Furthermore, the finding and explanation of a soft article has a theoretical implication since the term "soft article" has not being mentioned in the literature review even though such practice has been identified. Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 37) cite Pan (2000, p. 85), *"Often a newspaper will seek financial sponsorship from a news source for editing a special section or writing an in-depth story. Sometimes the sponsor covers travel and other expenses. At other times, the sponsor may bring cash in so-called "red packets".* This is an example where the concept of soft article has being somewhat mixed with the concept of media allowance. Three types of payments are mentioned here without distinction: financial sponsorship; covering travel and other expenses; and "red packets". According to findings from this thesis, if a newspaper or journalist write and publish an article about a corporation, which often has some news value, then a monetary payment also called "red packets" in the form of media allowance is often given. The corporation may also cover the travel expenses and other expenses of the journalist if they need to travel for the story. If a PR practitioner or a corporation representative writes an article, which often lacks news value, and wants to publish it under the name of the media or the journalists, then an additional "advertisement fee" will be paid. The latter is called soft article. Media allowance paid for publishing normal press releases and "advertisement fee" paid for publishing soft articles are different in nature and the amounts also vary significantly.

Chen and Culbertson (2003, p. 37) continue, *"red packet" has become a code phrase for corruption in some journalistic quarters, and government officials have railed against it. However, it continues, according to our informants."* The findings from this thesis are in contrary to the finding by Chen and Culbertson (2003). The interview participants do not consider the practice of "red packet", often in the form of media allowance, as corruption. Also, there is no evidence to assert that the government officials have railed against it. However, Chen and Culbertson (2003) are vague in defining "red packets", whether they are advertisement fee for soft article, media allowance for attending an event, or some other money paid to bribe the media. Yet, the interview and observation have not discovered other corruptive practices, therefore, "red packets" can be assumed to be media allowance.

Therefore, the arguments of them being corruptive and railed against by the government are inconclusive since the Chinese seem to be extremely comfortable with media allowance due to they are deeply rooted in the culture and traditional customs. The contrast in findings could perhaps be explained by the year that the studies are conducted. It is possible that in year 2003, government officials have tried to abolish media allowance. However, the recent thesis research shows that the Chinese have become adaptable and accept the practice.

Overall, the theoretical implication of this thesis lies within the extensive exploration of the Chinese culture in investigation of the media relations practices unique to the Chinese society and culture. The research conducted suggests that it is nearly impossible to clearly point out which aspects of culture are the most influential in media relations. This is because the Chinese culture is profound, situational, intertwined and overlapped with each other. The thesis has looked into Hall's cultural context, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the Chinese *guanxi* and Confucius three principles as relevant aspects of culture discovered in the previous literature that are influential to public relations. The *Hongbao* culture and *renqing* are two aspects of culture that have emerged during the interview. They are all influential to media relations, and more or less result the practice of media allowance and soft article, as well as leading to an industry phenomenon that implicit or unspoken rules often prevail written guidelines and regulations.

The practical implications of this thesis are two-fold. Firstly, the practical implication of Figure 6 to Figure 9 cannot be underestimated. Even though the Figures may not be generalizable for all PR agencies, but some parts of it such as the preference for communication channel should be transferable. The figures provide useful information relevant to practicing media relations within the Chinese cultural context including the communication preferences, how to identify the key media partners, and how to establish media contacts. Secondly, another practical implication is the finding that Chinese journalists expect differently from Western PR practitioners and from Chinese PR practitioners. The Chinese journalists do not expect the Western PR practitioners to follow

the local practices and Chinese customs. They do not seem to be offended when a Western practitioner does not behave according to the cultural norms, for example gift giving and banqueting. This finding indicates that a Western practitioner can relax on the Chinese customs, and it also explains why many Western practitioners can work in the Chinese PR industry without being familiar or complying to the social norms and cultural practices.

6.3 Research Limitations and Suggestions

This section will discuss the limitations of this study and put forth suggestions for future research. The main issue with this study is generalizability, which was already brought to attention under the research methodology chapter. There is the question whether the findings can be generalized since the study is confined to one PR agency and the interview sample is rather limited. It is argued that most parts of this study can be generalized because how aspects of the Chinese culture impact media relations practices are likely to be consistent within the PR industry. The following paragraphs will explore the generalizability issue further. This study is nevertheless a good basis for future research, setting the transferability question aside. That is researchers may get ideas and directions on issues that they can explore in the future based on the findings of this thesis. Next, the limitations of this study will be discussed alongside suggestions for future research.

IT Media: This study is confined to a specific team, which serves an IT client and deals with mostly the IT media. According to the participants, IT journalists are generally more ethical and easier to deal with than journalists in other industries such as automobile, real estate and finance. In addition, IT media are rather different from traditional and government media, where the latter is more bureaucratic and have less freedom. Therefore, it will be interesting to conduct a study on other media industries to observe the differences. Moreover, because the observation only took place within one of the PR teams, therefore, it is not conclusive since teams may vary in their media relations practices.

Multinational PR Agency: The study was conducted in a multinational PR agency serving mainly international clients. Consequently, the media relations practices is somewhat more professional and transparent than many local Chinese PR agencies. It is more professional in the sense that public relations originate from the United States and the practices are more mature in Western countries compared to China. It is more transparent because rules and regulations are followed more strictly in the West compared to the East due to cultural differences as pointed out earlier. Therefore, it will definitely be worthwhile to study how local Chinese PR agencies serving a Chinese client base carry out their public relations and media relations practices. Furthermore, there might be a difference between in-house PR practitioners working in corporations and PR professionals working in agencies. It could be assumed from the literature review that PR agencies are often responsible for media relations whereas corporate public relations might be more about setting strategic directions.

Media Allowance: By knowing the existence of media allowance and having a rough picture of this practice, researchers can expand to investigate this common practice further. Participant A conveyed a compelling view during the interview that researchers should not ask PR practitioners why they hand out media allowance but to ask the media why they take it. Participant A thinks that if the media does not demand media allowance then this practice will not exist. An excellent future study would be to get the media's perspective on media allowance, what the money is for, how it has started and why it exists. The media might be able to offer better or different answers regarding media allowance.

In addition, the conclusion regarding the practice of media allowance may not be conclusive due to an inconsistency with the study by Jiang (2007, p 19), one of the interviewee comments that the amount of media allowance determines the words that get printed. The finding of this thesis indicates that the payment of media allowance does not guarantee publication and positive coverage. This inconsistency prompts the researcher to question whether media allowance in other cities or PR agencies may be associated with pay for coverage. That being said, future researchers should investigate the practice of

media allowance further, for example, how local agencies or PR agencies in other cities practice media allowance.

Soft Article: According to the findings, PR practitioners do not seem to be concerned with the ethical dilemma of soft articles. Some even claim that the readers can tell the differences. Further research can be done to study the soft article in China, for example whether the readers can tell the difference between a normal article and a soft article, and whether the readers find the soft articles disturbing.

Lastly, the researcher would like to encourage future researchers to employ participant observation in their studies when investigating localized PR practices in China due to one of its major advantage. As Chen and Culbertson (2003) point out, a nature of a collectivist society is that people are cold toward outsiders while taking good care of in-group members. The Chinese are genuinely happy and eager to help out friends, sometimes even going beyond the boundaries. Having a personal relationship with the participants generated more insights and greater depth for this study. All four Chinese participants have expressed some point during the interview that they are being straightforward with the researcher because of the friendship. For example, Participant C, who was extremely cooperative during the interview, stated after the recorder was turned off that he had forgotten that the interview was being recorded. Participant E put forth during the interview that he was revealing because of the personal relationship.

"Western and Chinese culture are different, for example if you interview Participant A, he might tell you many facts from a rational point of view, and very logical. When we two sit here today, I think of you more of a friend, so that's why I revealed so much to you. This is a major difference between Chinese and Western culture. We have a good relationship, so I will pour my heart out to you. If it is a Westerner, then he might think more rationally whether or not he should reveal this information. Because I only need to answer your

question and I don't need to elaborate the details to you, therefore, if we were not familiar, I would not have discussed many things with you."

It could indeed be observed that the interview responses from Participant A differ from the responses from the Chinese participants format wise and content wise. Participant A, in fact, did not say a single negative issue about the Chinese media. The Chinese participants, on the other hand, gave sincere criticisms towards the media and the PR industry. When was asked about media allowance, Participant A used a great deal of hedging and words that would soften negative implications. Of course, it is understandable that a good PR practitioner should never criticize your collaborators, and especially not to judge the Chinese government, at least not in an interview, and not while it is recorded. All four Chinese participants are no longer working in Ogilvy at the time when this thesis is being completed, thus, it minimizes the concern of their identities being detected. However, the research believes that the findings of this thesis puts the case company in a positive light rather than a negative light, since it can be concluded that the media relations practices in Ogilvy is rather professional, standardized, and most importantly, do not possess unethical intentions.

The main advice or suggestion within the last paragraphs is for future researchers who are planning to study public relations practices or any other concealed matter in the Chinese context to adopt participant observation as a research methodology. The participants in this study explicitly express that they are being helpful and revealing because of the personal relationship and friendship with the researcher. Thus, it can be perhaps concluded that depending on the research topic, establishing a personal relationship with the Chinese interviewees will help to generate more meaningful insights, which has greater pros than cons.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions (in English)

1. Could you describe what are your daily responsibilities and tasks at work?

2. Could you define or describe what is public relations?

3. How much in percentage does your work relates or deals with media relations?

4. Could you define or describe what is media relations? And how media relations is practiced, or in other words, how does it work?

5. Are you familiar with the media relations in Western countries and how it is practiced there? If yes, could you compare media relations in the West to the media relations in China? What are the main differences if there is any?

6. Do you know about media allowance, also called transportation allowance, in China? If yes, could you describe what it is and why do you think this practice exists?

7. Do you know about the soft article, which is similar to the advertorial in the West, existing in China? If yes, have you written soft article before and how often? Could you describe such practice and why do you think this exists?

8. Do you think Chinese culture including its cultural traditions has an impact or influence on media relations in China and the way it is practiced? If yes, could you describe what aspects or what parts of Chinese culture or cultural traditions influence media relations the most?

9. How does the Chinese culture and cultural traditions that you described affect and influence media relations and its practices in China. What are the outcomes, and what part of media relations has been affected or changed?

10. Do you have any advice or recommendation for foreign businesses when dealing with Chinese media? For example, how to build a good relationship with the Chinese media？

11. Do you have any further comments or issues that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 2: Interview Questions (in Chinese)

1. 您能描述一下你平常的工作内容吗？

2. 您能定义或描述一下什么是公共关系吗？

3. 您觉得媒体关系在你日常工作里占据了多少的比例？

4. 您能定义或描述一下什么是媒体关系吗？媒体关系包括哪些工作，具体做些什么？

5. 您对西方国家的媒体关系了解吗？如果了解，您能比较一下西方的媒体关系与国内的媒体关系吗？如果有区别的话，最大的区别是什么？

6. 您对媒体交通费了解吗？如果了解的话，您能介绍一下媒体交通费是什么，为什么在国内会有这个习惯吗？

7. 您对软文了解吗？如果了解，您能介绍一下软文是什么，为什么在国内会有这个习惯吗？您之前写过软文吗？

8. 您认为中国文化包括它的文化传统对国内的媒体关系以及媒体关系的工作有影响吗？如果有，您能描述下哪方面的中国文化或文化传统对媒体关系影响最深？

9. 您刚才描述的中国文化以及传统文化是怎么影响媒体关系的？或者说，媒体关系的具体哪部分被影响了？

10. 您有好的建议或忠告给予跟国内媒体打交道的外企吗？比如如何与国内媒体建立良好关系？

11. 您还有什么要补充或探讨吗？

Appendix 3: Interview Transcript

1. We tend to send our press releases to everyone in the database. As long as the journalists sees it and knows this kind of press releases exists, then one day when there is a need, they might think of it and use it. Then this aim is achieved, which is to keep journalists updated. (Participant C)

2. I have sent very boring press releases to a bunch of journalists. In the end only two had published it. Many journalists who are familiar with us didn't publish it. I had to then talk to individual journalists one by one asking them to publish it. Usually if we don't hear from the journalist after sending out the press releases, we will call the familiar ones and follow up. (Participant C)

3. I do deal with the media a lot, for important clients and important stories or important issues, a lot. I sometimes call up a journalist and say I have something that would be very interesting to your readers. (Participant A)

4. Media relations is not only about communicating to the media when there is a need to push a certain article, but also on a regular basis to get to know their [journalists'] focus, what they are interested in, and see if we have a chance to cooperate or work on something together. (Participant C)

5. Although my superior are in charge of these [media] relations, but I also began to build relations, though from a different angle (Participant C). They (middle level practitioners) focus quite a lot on print media. From the traditional perspective, print media plays an important role since it allows depth (Participant B). We deal with online media more, they are more scattered, and we would ask around if they can push an article for us" (Both Participants).

6. If you don't do it [make the phone call], it [the email] is likely to be ignored. People don't think you are sincere or the matter is important. (Participant D)

7. If we want to get our client to the national news, then it's about public relations with the government. The client has its own people working on government affairs, which aren't covered by us. (Participant C)

8. The concept of media in English indicates medium or channel, and one can touch the audience through this medium. Therefore, the media that your audience pays attention to is naturally the most important. For example, old people like to watch television. Thus, television is more important for reaching the old people. Young people like to surf the Internet, so the Internet is more important in order to reach the young people. (Participant D)

9. We constantly scan for new publications or media and they media that enter this industry, which are a fit for our client. (Participant C)

10. If we are going to serve a new client, we will first investigate the media related to his industry, list the media that we need, and then contact the media. (Participant E)

11. We can ask contact information and references from colleagues and friends in the media. Each media and each journalist has its own circle. They know each other through these rather fixed circles, and through one journalist you can get to know the others. (Participant E)

12. Our client has connections to various media more or less since it is a huge and vast corporation. Even if we don't have the connection, another team might have it. (Participant B) We can also ask around in our agency, for example, saying we are urgently looking for XXX journalist in XXX media, if someone has the contact, he or she will share it. (Participant C)

13. We can just call to the media, introduce ourselves and explain our needs, and ask if they could connect us to the chief editor. This would work most of the time. (Participant C)

14. Brand here [in media relations in China] is important. (Participant C)

15. When we contact the media, we bring up the names of our client and our agency. That gets us the connection (Participant B). We approach a new media with the identity of a professional public relations practitioner and a representative of our client. We use the brand of our PR agency because it has established credibility in the industry (Participant E).

16. Because of some client's established reputation among IT journalists, they will report the press releases sent to them even if there is little personal connection between the journalist and the sender. (Participant E)

17. We will send press releases to unknown media given that we have their contact information. However, if we don't know the media at all, I don't think they will publish the press release even if we send it to them. The possibility is very low, except that if you pay them. (Participant D)

18. We do no easily send press releases to media that we haven't being in contact before. Firstly because it's unlikely that they will respond to your press release if you don't know each other. Secondly, it's uncertain what the media will do with the information. I prefer not to do things that are uncertain or might even have negative consequences. (Participant E)

19. If we really want to send our press release to a media that we haven't being in contact before, we will contact that media first. We want to build some relationship if possible, and at least let the other party know what we need. We will never just send out the press release to an unknown media without talking to them first; it is impolite and unprofessional. (Participant E)

20. We need to establish contact first, after knowing each other for some time and working together for a couple of times, then you could start considering taking the relationship to a more personal level (Participant E). Relationship is built from establishing a connection, then you invite them to events, they publish article for you, we get an evaluation of each other (Participant B).

21. Media is looking for resources and we are also looking for resources. Some journalists will contact us if they are doing a column and they would sometimes think of us when we fit nicely into it. (Participant B)

22. The media will also contact us for information. If they are writing a big topic, then they will need to find different corporations concerning this topic. For example in the case of cloud computing, which will involve many firms such as Dell, HP, IBM, etc. They will

contact these corporations in order to see how they do it. Since they might not have the direct contacts so they will call us for the contacts. (Participant D)

23. A part of the job of a PR practitioner is to bring back the feedback from the media and industry experts on how they view the products and the new technology to the client corporation, so that the PR manager in the client corporation can then share the feedbacks with stakeholders. (Participant C)

24. The media needs to have information and sources for their reporting. First hand information comes from the corporations. If the media sees PR people and corporation representatives as opponents, then they won't get the information that they need. (Participant D)

25. Gifts, dinners and gatherings maintain the personal aspect of relationship. (Participant D)

26. We sometimes invite the media to lunch or to dinner to foster relationship, same with gift giving, and just like friends. These are all to build friendship rather than to bribe. (Participant E)

27. Banqueting and gift giving doesn't really affect the impartiality of the media, because everyone is doing the same, it doesn't make your behavior any special. The only exception would be if they receive a gift that is really expensive, then it might make them think twice about what they write, but small gifts will not influence their impartiality. (Participant B)

28. If there is an explosive crisis or issue, the media will not care about us, especially the large online portal sites. They will publish it in a timely fashion because attracting readers is more important to them. …… They will put it out instantly to beat the competition; often they will not even give you heads up. The portal sites are much crueler than the specialized IT websites. (Participant C)

29. The media will verify whether it is true when a crisis happens, and how do we view this, and add it to his reporting. So the journalists will gather views from different parties for a comprehensive reporting. (Participant D)

30. The media has its own principles and impartiality. You can influence the media but cannot control the media. The biggest failure in PR is wanting to control the media. But influencing the media is what public relations practitioners can and should do. (Participant D)

31. I think any media has its own viewpoints and represent different interest groups. The definition of public is very wide, I am part of the public and so are you, what if our viewpoints and interests are not the same, who does the media represent then? Sometimes truth and facts are not that evident. I don't think there is definite objectivity, Western media is not necessarily objective, and for example when they report about China, they represent their own interest groups. I think media in different societies function in its own way, just like western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. Western medical practitioners condemn that traditional Chinese medical practices are immature and not standardized; many practices do not have scientific studies to back them up. However, Chinese traditional medicine has its own system, viewing it from the Western perspective you will think it is nonsense. This is because theoretical base is different.

32. It is very long and we spent a long time learning it…we have to spend several hours to pass an exam and answer many questions, including role-play type of questions. (Participant C)

33. Few people can remember it. It's just a procedure. (Participant B)

34. The policy we try to follow is twice the transportation, but sometimes that is different based on the story that they are doing and how far the transportation is, so it varies, but we try to keep it to a definitely limited amount (Participant A).

35. It depends on the media; some news agencies already cover the transportation cost of their journalists. In some media, the journalists have to give the media allowance to their news agency, while in some media the journalists can keep the full amount. It is uncertain how the media allowance is then distributed between the journalists and their news agency. (Participant E)

36. For instance, if there is an event that needs the reporting of CCTV (China Central TV) the most then we are willing to pay them more. (Participant E)

37. Media allowance is a common practice and has become a custom. You can think of it as paying the journalists who arrive by your invitation as their transportation fee, their commission or their reward for coming. (Participant E)

38. There are a few professional journalists who will publish an article even if they don't get media allowance. But I can't think of any right now. (Participant B)

39. It's also normal that some media take the media allowance and do not publish anything. Usually, for the PR agency, if you have given transportation allowance to the media, you always follow up and ask when they will publish the article. If the journalist insists on not publishing anything, and just takes the money, there is nothing we can do. (Participant E)

40. There is one reporter who really has a bad temper but he is also very knowledgeable of the industry, he can ask really tough questions that even some of the researchers find it difficult to answer. But they are such good questions that the scientists think hard about it when they go back. (Participant B)

41. There is one journalist who tends to analyze things from another angle, not merely pointing out the negative but very analytical as well, and he is not wrong. He is also good at persuading his readers to believe in what he is saying. (Participant B) Being the bosses, they know that he [the journalist] is sincere and telling the truth, so they actually appreciate it [negative comments]. (Participant C)

42. If you [the journalists] only do it for the money, then long-term development is impossible. ……If you [the journalists] only sing praises everyday then nobody is going to read it. ……A successful or good media must have its own viewpoints. (Participant D)

43. There are some journalists who do this to an extreme extent, they come to the event and leave immediately after they get the media allowance. They pretend to be extremely cool and say 'I really need to leave right now but remember to send me the press release

afterwards, don't forget, ok?' Usually they will publish it, exactly as you send them. (Participant C)

44. Maybe it's from the tradition that in China if we invite or request someone to come and do something, we need to show our appreciation. "So, if someone did something for you, you give him or her a *Hongbao* for doing it. It has become a custom. (Participant C)

45. During old times if we need to have someone carry a letter for us, we give a *Hongbao* to that person. During the past, for example, if we want to pass our letter to a high government official, we need to give some money to the person who is delivering it, the more you give the better it gets performed. (Participant B)

46. I think you can understand it this way, for example, a patient lies in the emergency room, and the family members are waiting anxiously outside, they will give surgeons and doctors a *Hongbao*.

47. It could be viewed as a charge for service when the journalist publishes an article for us, and we pay a commission. I think it becomes acceptable if one think about it in this way, pay a fee for the work that the journalist performs. (Participant E)

48. Because of scarce resources, one needs to pay extra to obtain these scarce resources. The media has limited pages and spaces, and corporations who want to gain access to it is overwhelming, much more than these limited pages can cover. ……This is why there is media allowance. If there are more media spaces then information quantity then there won't be the need for media allowance.

49. There are some traditional values and customs involved. You give money as benefits to people who carry out missions for you such as deliver your letter, money make the world go round. But again it's scarcity. *Hongbao* will not exist if there are more doctors than patients. When dealing with this scarcity, Westerners and Chinese deal with it differently. Chinese tend to give benefits [in the form of *Hongbao*] to the other party when asking them to help and solve problems for them. (Participant D)

50. The foundation in West and in China is different. Western society is based on science, law and religion. China is based on *renqing*. Although China is trying to become a legal

society, but I don't believe it will be, because throughout the thousands of years of its history, there is no tradition of laws in China. In a law based society, if it is stipulated by the law, regulations or policies that you cannot take *Hongbao*, then people tend to obey and act according to the law. However, Chinese society is based on *renqing* and *guanxi*, therefore maintaining *guanxi* is the main concern, so these things [media allowance] may happen. (Participant D)

51. It [soft article] depends on the need and requirement of the client. Some clients prefer soft articles some prefer organizing events. (Participant D)

52. Rather than compliment directly, it stands more from the reader's point of view, foster deeper understanding of the matter, which the reader tends to be more receptive. (Participant E)

53. It [soft article] won't directly say things about the enterprise but from a non-direct approach it will reflect things about your enterprise, quite implicit, and acceptable for the readers. (Particpant E)

54. Nowadays, we need to consider the interests and needs of the readers, because a reader will skip to another article if he or she finds yours uninteresting. You need to make the article appealing to the readers meanwhile keeping the requirement of the client in mind. What I see of soft paper is something that does not irritate the readers as traditional advertising that readers nowadays try to ignore and block. (Participant E)

55. Because soft article was such a popular phenomenon that most articles that the readers were in contact with were in the form of soft article, therefore nowadays, the amount has somewhat decreased. It is just like drinking porridge, if you drink porridge in the morning, in the noon and for dinner, one day you will get fed up and annoyed of the porridge and try to pour out the water from the rice. (Participant E)

56. Not many publications can make their living from merely selling issues. A major revenue stream is from advertising revenue and other revenues. If they can't get advertisements, then soft articles make a good revenue stream. During earlier times, the news agencies operate under the government and are supported by the government.

Nowadays, news agencies need to compete in the free market environment. Therefore, they need revenue streams. In order to increase revenue, some of their pages are used for advertising, and some for soft articles. Government owned news agencies have slightly lower need for these activities, since there is less pressure for survival. For commercial media, if they cannot sell enough publications for this month, then the next month they won't afford to pay for salaries. (Participant D)

57. Public relations and advertisements are bundled and sold as one package. (Participant C)

58. The media in China all have pressure to sell advertisement spaces. Because our client has bought some of these spaces, therefore, they would need to kind of cooperate with us. If they don't cooperate then we won't buy advertising in their space, for the most online media it is like this. In some cases, online media even take this to an extreme. The sales representative [of the media] will do the selling with a journalist. They bundle advertisement together with public relations, and say words like, 'we can cooperate on this. I have brought a journalist who can write articles for you', and what the sales representative means by cooperating is getting advertisement fees from our client. (Participant B)

59. When interacting with the media, half of the relationship allows you stand on a professional side to discuss about possible collaborations. The other half, when you are working with the media, you are dealing with that particular person. ……Communication needs skills, under the Chinese mindset, affection or personal relations is also very important, it adds value. (Participant D)

60. I think the Chinese culture does have good moral values, which sometimes causes us to abandon the work-relation distance and treat them like friends when working with the media. Culture encourages us to build that kind of harmonious relationship, this in turn entails gift giving among other practices. (Participant E)

61. If being in the Chinese PR industry for almost 20 years indicate that he [Participant A] must know these practices then the same logic should apply to his Chinese, which is still very lousy. (Participant E)

62. As everybody knows that this industry is gigantic, just like an apple tree, there are good apples and rotten apples. Some journalists that I have been in contact with are very professional and dedicated. They are very rational when making judgments and decisions. Although the majority of us think that the general direction of the industry is not good, but there are journalists who are very professional and specialized in their field. (Participant E)

63. One of the main reasons of the immaturity of the media is due to the PR people who spoil and indulge them. For example, in the automobile industry, some senior editors will demand business class seats and five star hotels if they want him to travel to an event, otherwise he won't go. If the corporation and the PR agent had not provided him these luxuries in the first place, it would not have become a habit. (Participant E)