



***CONTESTING STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHINESE
BY CHINESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS***

SENG HUI ZANNE

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

March 2020

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

Stereotypical representations are the generalised descriptions and assumptions made about a group of people, which are constructed, transmitted, and learned through discourse in social interactions. Stereotyping discourse is portrayed as fact that certain characteristics are shared among all the members of the group. Much has been written on the negative consequences of defining people, particularly marginalised groups in stereotypical ways, highlighting discrimination and perpetuation of social inequalities as their result. On the other hand, less work has been done focusing on how the people facing stereotypical traits and behaviours attributed to them deal with or respond to the stereotyping discourses. However, in order to fully understand the effects of stereotyping, it is important to first examine the processes through which targets of stereotyping discourses are able to recognise such discourses as negative and act to remove themselves from the subject positions they are placed in those discourses. This is especially so when the stereotyping discourse is subtle and not easily identified, and hence, more difficult to resist. This study sought to investigate Chinese university students' response towards stereotypical representations of the Chinese described in an intercultural training video. Specifically, the study examined how the students interpret negative stereotyping discourses in the video and employ strategies to resist stereotypical representations. A video produced by a well-known 'expert' teaching intercultural communication with Chinese people was screened to sixteen university students from the People's Republic of China studying at a Malaysian university. Focus group discussions were conducted with the participants after the video screening to obtain their reactions to the representations of Chinese identity and behaviour described by the intercultural trainer in the video. Analysis of the data was informed by Fairclough's (2001) three dimensional framework for discourse analysis, van Leeuwen's representation of social actors (2008) and van Dijk's ideological square (2011). The findings show that participants were not aware of the discourse context in which stereotyping descriptions are used as the trainer's resource in his intercultural training business whereby constructing people as "different" from the clients in his training session is a matter of business survival. Also, participants were ambivalent in their recognition of stereotyping discourses and demonstrated difficulty in resisting

them. The strategies found employed by participants in resisting what they regarded as negative descriptions of the Chinese were to construct subgroups within the superordinate group, reframing stereotypes as positive, normalising stereotypical traits and behaviours, positioning themselves as outsider, questioning the expertise of the trainer, devaluing the perspectives of the “out-group”, and rationalising the negative representations through philosophising about the fluidity of culture. The study concludes that resisting and removing oneself from stereotypical representations in which one is placed requires intense identity work and is difficult to achieve. This study contributes to the study on empowering victims of stereotyping discourse, sheds light on the difficulty of the members of the stereotyped group to recognise stereotyping discourses and resist the stereotypical representations.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

CABARAN REPRESENTASI STEREOTAIP CINA OLEH MAHASISWA CINA

Oleh

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Gambaran stereotaip adalah pentakfiran dan anggapan umum yang dibuat terhadap sekumpulan manusia, yang boleh dibina, dihantar, dan dipelajari melalui wacana dalam interaksi sosial. Wacana stereotaip menggambarkan fakta bahawa ciri-ciri tertentu dikongsi dalam kalangan semua ahli kumpulan. Kebanyakan kajian adalah mengenai kesan negatif pentakfiran manusia, terutamanya golongan terpinggir ditakrifkan dengan cara stereotaip, menonjolkan diskriminasi dan mengekalkan ketidaksamaan sosial sebagai hasilnya. Sebaliknya, masih kurang kajian yang difokuskan kepada bagaimana manusia menghadapi ancaman stereotaip dan tingkah laku serta tindak balas mereka terhadap wacana stereotaip. Untuk memahami sepenuhnya kesan stereotaip, ia adalah penting untuk terlebih dahulu mengkaji proses-proses sasaran stereotaip dapat mengenali wacana stereotaip sebagai negatif dan bertindak untuk mengelakkan diri dari posisi subjek yang diletakkan dalam wacana tersebut, terutamanya apabila wacana stereotaip tersebut tidak mudah dikenal pasti, maka lebih sukar untuk menentang stereotaip. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik tindak balas mahasiswa Cina terhadap gambaran stereotaip warganegara Cina yang diterangkan dalam rakaman latihan antara budaya. Khususnya, kajian ini meneliti bagaimana mahasiswa Cina mentafsirkan wacana stereotaip negatif dalam rakaman dan menggunakan strategi untuk menentang gambaran stereotaip tersebut. Rakaman yang dihasilkan oleh "pakar" pengajar komunikasi antara budaya yang terkenal dipaparkan kepada enam belas mahasiswa dari Republik Rakyat China yang sedang belajar di sebuah universiti di Malaysia. Perbincangan kumpulan fokus telah dijalankan dengan para peserta selepas pemaparan rakaman untuk mendapatkan tindak balas mereka terhadap gambaran identiti dan tingkah laku warganegara Cina yang diterangkan oleh pelatih antara budaya dalam rakaman. Analisis data dilakukan berdasarkan rangka tiga dimensi Fairclough (2001) untuk analisis wacana, representasi pelaku sosial van Leeuwen (2008) dan ideologi empat segi van Dijk (2011). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa peserta tidak menyedari konteks wacana di mana penafsiran stereotaip digunakan sebagai sumber jurulatih dalam perniagaan latihan komunikasi antara budaya di mana pembinaan manusia sebagai "berbeza" daripada pelanggan dalam sesi latihannya demi keuntungan perniagaan. Selain itu, para peserta tidak yakin dengan mengenal pasti wacana stereotaip dan menunjukkan kesukaran untuk menentang stereotaip tersebut.

Strategi yang diguna oleh para peserta untuk menentang apa yang mereka anggap sebagai pentakrifan negatif warganegara Cina adalah dengan membina subkumpulan dalam kumpulan superordinat, membentuk semula stereotaip sebagai positif, membiasakan sifat dan kelakuan stereotaip, meletakkan diri mereka sebagai “orang” luar dari golongan, mempersoalkan kepakaran jurulatih, merendahkan perspektif kumpulan lain, dan merasionalisasi gambaran negatif melalui falsafah mengenai ciri-ciri perubahan budaya. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa penentangan dan menarik diri dari gambaran stereotaip yang diletakkan memerlukan kerja penentuan identiti yang amat teliti dan penentangan stereotaip sukar dicapai. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada kajian yang memberi kuasa kepada mangsa-mangsa dalam wacana stereotaip, menjelaskan kesukaran mangsa-mangsa dalam kumpulan stereotaip mengenal pasti wacana stereotaip dan menentang gambaran stereotaip tersebut.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Conversation analysis
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
DHA	Discourse-historical approach
DP	Discursive psychology
DRA	Dialectical-relational approach
EFL	English as foreign language
NA	Narrative analysis



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study and the problem statement by discussing the concept of stereotype, the negative impacts of stereotype, the difficulty in resisting stereotype and the research gap. Then, the purpose and objectives of this study and the research questions are outlined. Besides that, the context of this study is explained because the current study is context-dependent. After that, the significance and the scope of study are explained. At the same time, the definition of key terms used in this study is also listed in this chapter. The summary of this chapter is presented as the last part.

1.1 Background of the study

Stereotyping has been studied widely to understand its conceptualisation, causes, process, social impacts, and the ways to address the issue. However, it still exists in today's society in various forms such as racial, national, religious, gender and age stereotypes. Stereotypes exist everywhere, and everyone engages in stereotyping to a lesser or greater degree. In other words, everyone is the holder and target of stereotypes. Stereotypes are generally defined as "qualities perceived to be associated with particular groups or categories of people" (Schneider, 2004, p. 24). Stereotyping occurs when people attribute certain characteristics to the members of a social group and assume that the characteristics can be applied to all of them. Besides that, stereotyping is viewed as an inevitable human mechanism to simplify the complex social world and to facilitate information processing about other individuals and groups (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Based on previously stored information, stereotyping helps people to make assumptions about other people and groups, and expects them to behave accordingly (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010).

Stereotypes are constructed to provide several functions to reach certain goals. For example, stereotypes are used to simplify complex information about individuals and groups so that people manage to make a quick decision (Allport, 1954). Besides that, stereotypes are also regarded as justification for in-group favouritism and out-group derogation to maintain one's self-esteem (Tajfel, 1981). This function is related to intergroup biases. People evaluate the individuals who are perceived as the members of their social group (the in-group) positively and evaluate the individuals who are perceived as the members of a different social group (the out-group) negatively (Dovidio et al., 2010; van Dijk, 2006). Stereotypes also serve to justify the privileges of certain groups by legitimising it as natural to gain more social and material resources (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

These functions of stereotype cause detrimental impacts to the targets of stereotyping such as low achievement in tests due to the stereotype threat applied to the stereotyped targets (Steele & Aronson, 1995), negative evaluation and unfair behaviour towards the

stereotyped group (Dovidio et al., 2010), low self-esteem and self-respect among stereotyped groups (Corrigan, Bink, Schmidt, Jones, & Rüschi, 2016), and limited resources for the stereotyped group (Jost & Banaji, 1994). The ways to resolve the stereotyping issue have become the research interest of scholars in a wide range of fields. However, most of the research conducted is on the ways to reduce stereotype from the perspective of the holder of stereotype. There are few studies about how the targets of stereotyping deal with the stereotypes. The stereotyped people have agency which is the ability to control and maintain one's life under the constraint of social structure (Ortner, 2006) in resisting stereotypes. Researchers acknowledged that the targets of stereotyping need to escape from the stereotyping due to its detrimental impacts that perpetuate psychological distress and social inequality. Nevertheless, the agentive actions to be performed by the stereotyped people to confront and reject the stereotypes has been under-explored by scholars.

1.2 Problem statement

Research that explored the effect of stereotyping on achievement has highlighted the difficulty in escaping the negative impacts of stereotyping. The targets of stereotyping face the risk to be evaluated negatively based on the negative stereotypes imposed on their group. Furthermore, stereotyping internalisation (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007) reinforces the difficulty to resist stereotyping. Socialisation, which is the process of internalising the norms of ideology shared in society leads to stereotyping internalisation. The stereotyped targets internalise the stereotypes and hold a distorted perception of their ability due to the influence of negative stereotypes (Bonnot & Croizet, 2011). The stereotyped individuals accept the negative stereotypes imposed on them subconsciously and their behaviours are constrained by this belief. By conforming to the negative stereotypes, the consequences are poor performance in tests and low self-esteem (Crocker & Quinn, 2003). A study by Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, and Moya (2010) on gender stereotyping found that the participants tend to conform to the stereotypes which are conveyed as desirable (benevolent) than the negative stereotypes. The female participants tend to de-emphasise their own achievements and ambitions to conform to the "positive" stereotype of a woman.

Operario and Fiske (2001) think that "one of the greatest challenges that stereotypes pose to organisations is that they simply go unchallenged" (p. 56). Stereotypes are difficult to identify. The subtle nature of stereotypes causes most of the stereotypes to remain unchallenged. In any ideological struggle, the implicit ideological control is regarded as more effective than the explicit ideological control. Scholars who explored the topic of ideology have argued that ideologies with elusive nature and invisibility become more challenging to be opposed (Fairclough, 2001; Barker, 1993). The difficulty in resisting negative stereotypes causes the stereotyped targets to employ coping strategies which adapt to the stigma-related situation. Studies on coping with stigma by the stigmatised individuals discovered that a wide-range of coping responses was employed by the stigmatised targets to deal with the stigma (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). The most common coping responses are either to change the stigma-related situation or to adapt to the stigma-related situation. The coping response of adapting to the stigma-related situation is often to be used when the stigma is difficult to be challenged and eliminated.

These studies show the difficulty to resist stereotypical representations, especially if the stereotype is not recognised and regarded as undesirable representations by the targets of stereotyping themselves. Studies that explore how stereotyped individuals cope with stereotyping often employed interviews with participants to evoke their feelings and past experiences. However, there is a need to examine more closely how targets of stereotyping recognise, interpret and respond to stereotyping discourses they are confronted with, particularly where the stereotyping is subtle and not so easily recognised.

This study sought to understand the processes of the Chinese participants who are the targets of stereotyping via discourse strategies in response to the stereotyping discourse presented to them. The stereotyping discourse presented to the Chinese participants was in the context of intercultural communication training. The rapid expansion of businesses into global markets due to globalisation (Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015) has made intercultural communication an important aspect of businesses. The need to have successful intercultural communication with Chinese people has been increased due to the rapid growth of the economy in China. The strong purchasing power of Chinese people causes more and more foreign investors to enter the Chinese market. Often, business conflicts might occur between foreign partners and the Chinese due to cultural misunderstanding. Thus, foreign companies seek an effective way to interact and do business with their Chinese counterparts.

Companies hire experts to provide intercultural training to train employees in intercultural communication by giving talks, lectures and workshops. Cases of communication failure are usually given as examples to study ways to communicate with companies in other countries. However, stereotyping is an important issue that cannot be ignored in intercultural training, especially when the intercultural trainer focuses on the ready-to-use know-how-to techniques (this is known as the essentialist approach). In the essentialist approach, intercultural communication is viewed as an interaction between two 'cultures'. The cultures are regarded as separate entities, and they are often linked with the concept of country or nationality (Dervin & Tournebise, 2013). In the essentialist approach, people from a culture share the same ideologies, behaviours and characteristics. Thus, a set of rules and ready-to-use know-how-to techniques are prepared for the learners to overcome intercultural conflicts (Virkama, 2010).

Nowadays, a large number of intercultural training applies the essentialist approach, including intercultural communication training focusing on the Chinese as the target group. This approach perpetuates stereotypes on the group of Chinese people because it generalises the Chinese and projects a typical image on them without considering the complexity of individuals. The stereotypical images of the Chinese put the foreign counterparts in stress and disadvantaged situation when the Chinese counterparts behave differently from what they expected (Wong & Stone, 2002). The stereotyping issue is an important aspect to be considered in intercultural communication. When people hold stereotypical representations which are very difficult to be changed, they refuse to change their mindset and choose to maintain the stereotypes (Lyons & Kashima, 2003). The stereotyped people face difficulty in resisting the stereotypes. Thus, the response of Chinese people who are the targets of stereotyping to the

stereotyping discourse in intercultural training context was explored in this study. Stereotypes are produced, transmitted and negotiated through discourse. Therefore, discourse analytical approach was used to discover the discourse strategies in talk and connecting them to participants' direct encounter with stereotyping discourses.

1.3 Purpose and objectives of the study

The study aims to explore the discourse process of responding to the stereotyping discourse by Chinese participants. Specifically, it will examine how participants interpret the stereotyping discourse, and how they accept, deny and contest the negative stereotypes imposed on them.

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To investigate the representation of social actors constructed by the participants as targets of stereotyping.
- ii. To explore the response orientations of the participants when facing the stereotyping discourse.
- iii. To examine the contestation of negative stereotypes by the participants in response to the stereotyping discourse.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions are as follows:

- i. How are social actors constructed and represented by participants in response to stereotyping discourse?
- ii. How are participants responding to the stereotypical representations imposed on them?
- iii. What are the discourse strategies employed by participants to contest negative stereotypes?

1.5 Context of the study

This study explores the participant's response to the stereotyping discourse in intercultural training context. The stereotyping discourse was a lecture on intercultural training provided for people who want to know how to communicate effectively with the Chinese. A video of this lecture was presented to the group that was the target of stereotyping (i.e. Chinese university students) to obtain their response.

Other than intercultural communication training provided by employers, social media such as blogs, social networks and YouTube become one of the platforms to gain information on intercultural communication. Due to the popularity and easy accessibility, social media become an important platform to access information and popular events. Besides that, social media is a platform for socialising. Social media allow people to exchange idea and interact virtually with others. For example, YouTube, which is a popular video-sharing platform that allows individuals to create

and share video content with the public (Sawyer & Chen, 2012). YouTube enables its consumers to post their own opinions and experiences, and then share them as information to other individuals.

Due to the popular trend of posting videos in social media, more and more videos related to intercultural communication such as intercultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, intercultural training, and intercultural competence targeted on a various group of people were available in social media, especially on the YouTube. Videos related to intercultural communication can be uploaded for the purpose of training, information, entertainment, persuasion, and even making profits. The intercultural trainers who aim for making profits produce the intercultural videos which targeted a particular group of people such as expatriate and employees working in a multinational company. The intercultural trainers upload videos to advertise their expertise and to provide information about the intercultural training programs they offered by introducing a brief idea on intercultural communication.

Recently, more and more teaching and learning about intercultural communication was carried out in virtual settings (Chen, 2017). Globalisation and multicultural environment increase the opportunity for people to interact and work with others from diverse backgrounds. Nowadays, intercultural training not only targets at expatriate or people working in international businesses but also includes the other people such as the students who enrol in a mobility program and any personnel that interact with people from diverse backgrounds. The high demand to interact with a specific group of people encourage the intercultural trainer to design a specific lesson which focuses on the teaching of ready-to-use know-how-to techniques to the learners. In most training contexts, people are typically introduced to a group they do not currently have much contact. Hence, they may accept the representations presented by intercultural experts. However, scholars think that a large number of intercultural training applies the approach which emphasises 'objective facts' about the 'cultural differences' of the unknown cultural Other. Stereotypical representations of a particular group and ready-to-use know-how-to techniques (handbook approach) are delivered to learners by intercultural 'experts' (Virkama, 2010; Dervin & Tournebise, 2013; Ly & Rygg, 2016). Much research has been conducted on the adverse effects of the handbook approach on intercultural communication (Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011). The intercultural trainers claim to teach the knowledge of certain cultures and provide some ways to interact with a particular culture. However, it is a strategy to market their 'proficiency' and 'knowledge'.

With the advancement of technology, people can easily find the resources on intercultural training online, especially multiple intercultural training videos shared in social media. The intercultural training videos which share the brief idea of intercultural communication and the information about a specific group could contribute to the general public who need this information. However, the public might face some problem if the representation of the specific group is inaccurate or the description of the cultures and practices of the group being represented are not accepted by members of that group itself.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study sheds light on the understanding of the complexity of stereotyping discourse, especially the elusive nature of stereotypes. It is difficult to oppose the stereotypes if the stereotypes are not recognised and not regarded as undesirable representations by the stereotyped people. Besides that, the targets of stereotyping have agency which is the ability to take action to control and influence the environment (Moore, 2016) in dealing with the stereotypes. This study focuses on the agentive role played by the targets of stereotyping to negotiate and reconstruct the stereotyped identities actively. Understanding the discourse strategies employed as immediate reactions in response to the stereotyping discourse might contribute to the literature on the study of resisting and coping with stereotyping.

This study explores the resistance of stereotyping discourse in the context of stereotyping in intercultural training. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of cultural stereotyping in intercultural communication training from the perspectives of the group members being represented (the Chinese) and hopes to draw attention to and address the stereotyping in intercultural training.

1.7 Scope of the study

This study focuses on the discourse process of the stereotyped people who are the Chinese participants in responding to the stereotyping discourse in the intercultural communication training context. Discourse analytical approach was used to explore the representations of social actors constructed by the participants, the response orientations and the discourse strategies employed in contesting the stereotypes. A video regarding intercultural communication training focusing on the Chinese as the target group was chosen as the material for this study. The intercultural training video produced by the intercultural trainer for the training and education purpose was chosen only. The intercultural training video produced by the public or the students was not chosen because the credibility and the expertise of the producer on the topic are questionable. This study is limited to the Chinese students from the People's Republic of China studying in a Malaysian university as the participants in this study. The Chinese participants from diverse backgrounds such as the Chinese from different age groups and different working fields were not recruited in this study due to the limited access to them

1.8 Definition of key terms

Several key terms were introduced in this chapter in order to provide a brief understanding of the key terms used in this study. A more detailed discussion of these key terms will be explained in Chapter Two. Four key terms which are culture, identity, social actors and stereotype were introduced as below.

1. Culture

The concept of culture is difficult to define. It contains multiple definitions constructed by scholars in various fields (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Scholars who inspired by essentialist approach view culture as a solid entity which determine who the people are (Buchtel, 2014; Gelman, 2003). Conversely, in non-essentialist approach, culture contains the feature of fluidity, and it can be changed in different context and time frame. Culture is constructed through social interaction among people, and the complexity of individuals is taken into account when people 'do' culture. The non-essentialist approach of culture was employed in this study.

2. Identity

Similar to the concept of culture, various approaches can be used to conceptualise identity. In the essentialist approach, identity is viewed as the 'essence' of oneself, a stable and subjective entity. Identities are the fixed inherent characteristics that determine who the person is (Moya, 2000). However, in the constructionist approach, identity is an intersubjective construction which is influenced by the social forces. The individuals position themselves and perform their identities through interaction with others (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). In this study, identity is viewed as an ongoing construction which is negotiated discursively in human communication.

3. Social actors

Social actors are the participants of social practices (van Leeuwen, 2008). Social actors can be human beings or abstract entities such as community, nation and country (Baker & Ellece, 2011). The social actors can be represented through various strategies according to the social actor network model constructed by van Leeuwen (2008).

4. Stereotype

Stereotype can be viewed as a mental representation constructed within the individual's mind (Lippmann, 1922) or a social representation influenced by a larger sociocultural context (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). In this study, stereotype is viewed as an overgeneralised image projected on a group of people. It is constructed socially and discursively between social actors in everyday interaction.

1.9 Summary of introduction

The background and the problem statement of the study were discussed in this chapter. The reason to choose the social group of the Chinese was also explained in this study. This study aims to explore the response of the participants who are the targets of stereotyping towards the stereotyping discourse in the context of intercultural communication training. The objectives and the research questions were outlined in this chapter. The context of the study which related to the intercultural training video was presented. Then, the significance and scope of the study were discussed in this chapter. Finally, the definition of terms and concepts used in this study was provided.

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