



# Analysis of the Cultural Connotations of “Guo Liang Tian” (In Two Days) from the Perspective of Face Theory in Social Psychology

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## Abstract

This paper explores the deep meanings and functions of the expression “Guo Liang Tian” (过两天 literally “In Two Days”) within Chinese culture from a social psychological perspective, particularly through the lens of face theory. The study finds that “Guo Liang Tian”, as an ambiguous temporal expression, is widely used to avoid direct refusals and to maintain both personal and others’ face, thereby promoting social harmony. Although this expression is broadly accepted in Chinese culture, it may cause misunderstandings and communication barriers in cross-cultural interactions. To mitigate these issues, strategies such as enhancing cultural sensitivity, specifying exact times, using double confirmation, and building trust are essential. This paper analyzes the social psychological functions of “Guo Liang Tian” in linguistic communication and its impact on interpersonal communication and social behavior patterns.

## Subject Areas

Psychology, Sociology

## Keywords

Guo Liang Tian (In Two Days), Social Psychology, Face Theory, Interactions, Chinese Culture

## 1. Introduction

In exploring the uniqueness of Chinese culture, language habits and expressions are critical aspects that cannot be overlooked. These linguistic phenomena are

not merely tools for daily communication but also reflect the core values and social psychological characteristics of the culture. “Guo Liang Tian” (literally “In Two Days”) is a commonly used vague temporal expression in Chinese, indicating an uncertain future time. It is often employed to postpone decisions or responses to avoid direct refusal or embarrassment. This expression highlights the importance of harmonious interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture, allowing both parties more time and space to consider and adjust, thus maintaining relationship harmony and stability. The vagueness of this expression not only reveals the flexible understanding of time in Chinese culture but also exemplifies a social psychological strategy to maintain interpersonal harmony and avoid direct conflict [1]. The widespread use of this expression demonstrates the Chinese cultural preference for indirect and non-confrontational communication, closely related to the collectivist cultural background and face culture.

Further exploration reveals that the linguistic expressions in Chinese culture are rich in symbolism and metaphor. For instance, the phrase “Liu Yi Shou” (留一手 keep a card up one’s sleeve) conveys a sense of wisdom and prudence, suggesting the need to maintain a degree of flexibility and reservation in communication. This linguistic habit is not only prevalent in everyday life but also widely applied in business negotiations and diplomatic settings, reflecting the high value placed on wisdom, strategy, and the delicate balance of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture. Thus, language serves not merely as a tool for information transmission but also as a crucial vehicle for cultural heritage. Through language, we can discern a nation’s way of thinking, value orientation, and social structure. These linguistic habits and expressions constitute an essential part of the distinctiveness of Chinese culture, aiding us in gaining a deeper understanding of the essence of this ancient civilization.

Social psychology provides a robust framework for understanding these phenomena. From a social psychological perspective, we can delve deeper into the cultural psychological mechanisms behind the expression “Guo Liang Tian”, including perceptions of time, handling interpersonal relationships, and using language strategies to avoid potential social conflicts [2]. Moreover, in different social and personal contexts, “Guo Liang Tian” as a linguistic strategy reflects how Chinese people skillfully balance personal actions with collective expectations in daily life.

Chinese scholars have also conducted in-depth analyses and discussions on such phenomena. Fei Xiaotong noted that Chinese interpersonal interactions and communication methods are distinctly indirect and implicit, a tradition that continues to influence the language expression and social behavior of modern Chinese people [3]. Wang Hui, in his discussion on the structural changes in modern Chinese society, analyzed the evolution of time concepts and their profound impact on social interactions, particularly how vague temporal expressions adapt to the demands of rapid social changes [4]. These studies enrich our understanding of the expression “Guo Liang Tian” and reveal the social and cultural dynamics behind it.

Combining Western and Chinese research perspectives, this paper aims to explore the social psychological functions of the expression “Guo Liang Tian” in Chinese culture, as well as the broader cultural values and social structural characteristics it reflects. Through this cross-cultural in-depth analysis, we can better understand the complexity of Chinese culture and its unique position in global cultural exchanges.

## **2. Social Psychological Theories**

Social psychology studies the behavior and psychological processes of individuals in social environments. By exploring the interaction between individuals and social environments, it reveals how behavior, emotions, and cognition are influenced and constrained by social norms. In discussing the expression “Guo Liang Tian”, social psychology provides powerful tools for understanding its role in interpersonal communication. This expression is not merely about delaying time; it is also a strategy to maintain harmony and face, significantly impacting interpersonal communication and social behavior patterns. The following are five important social psychological theories that can help us understand the social psychological functions of “Guo Liang Tian” in Chinese culture.

### **2.1. Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory posits that human social behavior is an exchange process where individuals aim to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs in interactions [5]. In Chinese culture, “Guo Liang Tian” can be seen as an exchange strategy. By using vague temporal expressions, individuals can avoid making immediate commitments, thus reducing the social costs associated with direct refusal. This strategy not only helps maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships but also allows more time and space to better respond to others’ needs in the future [6].

### **2.2. Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, proposed by Leon Festinger, suggests that when individuals hold conflicting cognitions, they experience psychological discomfort, which motivates them to change these cognitions to reduce dissonance [7]. In social interactions, if one party cannot immediately meet the other’s demands, direct refusal may lead to cognitive dissonance and relationship tension. Using a vague expression like “Guo Liang Tian” can temporarily alleviate this dissonance, reducing psychological pressure and conflict, thus maintaining harmony.

### **2.3. Face Theory**

Face Theory plays a crucial role in explaining social behavior in Chinese culture. Face refers to the social value and dignity an individual gains in social interactions. In Chinese culture, face significantly impacts an individual’s social status

and interpersonal relationships [8]. By using expressions like “Guo Liang Tian”, individuals can maintain both their own and others’ face without direct refusal, avoiding the embarrassment and conflict that direct refusal might cause.

#### **2.4. High-Context and Low-Context Cultures Theory**

Edward T. Hall’s High-Context and Low-Context Cultures Theory points out significant differences in communication styles across cultures. High-context cultures (like China) tend to use indirect and vague language, while low-context cultures (like the United States) prefer direct and explicit expressions [9]. In high-context cultures, non-verbal information and background knowledge play crucial roles in communication. Using vague expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” aligns with the indirect and implicit communication style of high-context cultures, helping to maintain harmonious and stable interpersonal relationships.

#### **2.5. Individualism and Collectivism Theory**

Individualism and Collectivism Theory, proposed by Geert Hofstede, explains the differences in individual and group relationships across different cultural backgrounds. Collectivist cultures (like China) emphasize group interests and harmony, with individual behavior often constrained by group norms [1]. In this cultural context, using vague temporal expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” helps balance personal and collective needs, avoiding the disruption of group harmony due to direct refusal [10].

#### **2.6. The Importance of Social Psychology Theories**

The importance of social psychology theories lies in their profound understanding of individual and group behavior, as well as their extensive applications across various practical fields. These theories not only help us explain and predict behavior but also enable the design and implementation of effective interventions to improve social welfare. By applying these theories, we can better comprehend the complexities of human behavior, promote harmonious interpersonal relationships, address social issues, and enhance the effectiveness of public policies and business strategies.

##### **2.6.1. Understanding Individual Behavior and Social Influence Mechanisms**

Social psychology theories provide a systematic framework for deeply understanding the formation, change, and maintenance of individual behavior and attitudes. For instance, attitude formation theories and cognitive dissonance theory explain how people form and change their attitudes through experiences and social influences. Consistency theory posits that individuals tend to maintain consistency between their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, while cognitive dissonance theory explores how people reduce psychological discomfort by changing attitudes or behaviors when inconsistencies arise. Additionally, social influence theories reveal how individuals change behavior under group pressure.

Classic conformity experiments (e.g., Asch's conformity experiments) and obedience experiments (e.g., Milgram's obedience experiments) demonstrate how behavior changes under group and authority pressure. These theories help us understand the dynamic processes of collective decision-making, social movements, and cultural transmission, providing scientific basis for education, advocacy, and policy formulation.

### **2.6.2. Promoting Interpersonal Relationships and Mental Health**

Social psychology theories offer valuable insights into the study of interpersonal relationships. Attraction theories explore why people are attracted to others, considering factors like physical attractiveness, similarity, and complementarity. Social exchange theory posits that interpersonal relationships are based on a cost-benefit analysis, with individuals choosing relationships that offer higher rewards and lower costs. Intimate relationship theories further explore the formation and maintenance of close relationships, such as attachment theory, which explains how early attachment relationships influence adult relationship patterns. These theories have practical applications in marriage counseling, family therapy, and workplace relationship management, helping improve individual mental health and quality of life. For example, by understanding and applying these theories, counselors and therapists can help individuals establish and maintain healthy relationships, resolve conflicts, and improve communication.

### **2.6.3. Addressing Social Issues and Promoting Public Policy**

Social psychology theories play a crucial role in addressing social issues. For example, prejudice and discrimination theories help explain and combat racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination. Stereotype threat theory suggests that individuals who are aware they may be judged based on stereotypes often perform worse. Social identity theory explores how individuals define themselves through group memberships, leading to in-group bias and out-group discrimination. These theories enable the design of interventions, such as educational programs and diversity training, to promote social equity and inclusion. Furthermore, governments and non-governmental organizations can use these theories to design and implement more effective public policies. For example, behavioral economics, which combines social psychology and economics, uses nudging strategies to encourage healthy behaviors, improve tax compliance, and increase environmental actions. These policy designs, based on a deep understanding of human behavior, can effectively influence public behavior and enhance policy implementation.

### **2.6.4. Guiding Business and Market Strategies**

In the business realm, social psychology theories are widely applied in marketing and consumer behavior research. Understanding consumer motivation, brand loyalty, and purchase decision-making processes can help companies develop more effective market strategies. For example, motivation theories and self-determination theory can help marketers understand both intrinsic and ex-

trinsic consumer motivations, leading to more attractive products and services. Brand loyalty theories explore how consumers form loyalty to brands through emotional bonds and satisfaction, suggesting that companies can enhance brand loyalty by improving customer experience and establishing emotional connections. Purchase decision process models reveal the stages consumers go through from recognizing a need to making a final purchase decision, helping companies optimize marketing strategies and boost sales. By understanding and applying these theories, businesses can not only enhance market competitiveness but also improve customer satisfaction and brand value.

### 3. Analysis of Face Theory

Face theory, introduced by Erving Goffman in his work “Interaction Ritual”, explains how individuals maintain their social value and dignity in social interactions. “Face” refers to the social identity and prestige one displays during interactions. In Chinese culture, face holds significant importance, influencing individual behavior and interpersonal strategies [8].

#### 3.1. Core Concepts of Face Theory in Chinese Culture

1) Self-esteem face: This pertains to an individual’s moral image and social reputation, closely linked to personal morality and character.

2) Prestige face: This relates to an individual’s status and honor within society, connected to their social standing and wealth [11].

#### 3.2. “Guo Liang Tian” as a Practical Application of Face Theory

In Chinese culture, face is not only a symbol of an individual’s social identity but also a crucial foundation for harmonious social relations. Individuals gain social recognition and respect by maintaining their face. Losing face can lead to severe social consequences, including broken relationships, social exclusion, and damaged self-esteem. Thus, people are highly conscious of maintaining and managing face in daily life.

##### 3.2.1. Avoiding Direct Refusal

In Chinese culture, directly refusing a request may be seen as impolite or damaging to the other person’s face. Using ambiguous expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” can effectively avoid direct refusal, preserving both one’s own face and the other’s dignity [11]. For instance, in a business context, if one party is unwilling to immediately agree to a request, saying “let’s discuss it in a couple of days” provides time to consider while avoiding the awkwardness of an outright refusal.

##### 3.2.2. Maintaining Harmonious Relationships

Chinese culture emphasizes harmonious interpersonal relationships. By using expressions like “Guo Liang Tian”, individuals can provide a vague commitment without a clear refusal, thereby maintaining relational harmony and stability [8]. For example, among friends, if it is inconvenient to meet immediately, saying

“maybe in a couple of days” avoids directly rejecting the invitation, thus preserving a friendly relationship.

### 3.2.3. Protecting Social Status and Dignity

Expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” help individuals protect their social status and dignity when facing requests from superiors or elders. For example, in the workplace, if an employee cannot complete a task immediately, saying “I will report back in a couple of days” shows respect for the superior while preserving personal face [11]. This psychological strategy is especially evident in business negotiations. For instance, in a Sino-foreign business negotiation, the Chinese representative responded to an urgent request from the foreign party with “we will reply in a couple of days”, allowing time for consideration and avoiding immediate refusal, thus preventing potential tension. Ultimately, the Chinese side provided a detailed response two days later, which the foreign party accepted and understood. This case illustrates the effectiveness of “Guo Liang Tian” in maintaining business relations and avoiding direct conflicts.

The expression “Guo Liang Tian” is also commonly used in family gatherings. For instance, if elders invite young people to an event over the weekend, but the young people are too busy to attend, they might say “we’ll see in a couple of days” to avoid directly rejecting the elders’ goodwill. This ambiguous time expression preserves the elders’ feelings and gives the young people some leeway, thus maintaining family harmony.

Through a detailed analysis and practical demonstration of face theory, it is evident that the expression “Guo Liang Tian” serves an important social psychological function in Chinese culture. It helps individuals maintain their face and dignity in complex social interactions, effectively avoiding direct conflict and awkwardness while sustaining harmonious relationships. This phenomenon deeply reflects the high value placed on face and social harmony in Chinese culture, providing an essential window for understanding Chinese social behavior patterns.

## 4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Face Theory in Chinese Culture

Face theory plays a crucial role in Chinese culture, with advantages in promoting social harmony and maintaining personal dignity, and encouraging indirect communication. However, overemphasis on face culture can lead to communication barriers, increased psychological pressure, and hinder genuine exchanges. As a form of social capital, face helps individuals avoid direct conflict and awkwardness in social interactions, thus preserving harmonious relationships. However, this indirect communication style can sometimes be misunderstood as irresponsibility or uncertainty, affecting communication effectiveness. Moreover, the pressure to maintain face can prevent individuals from expressing reasonable opinions or needs, impacting mental health and work performance.

## 4.1. Advantages

### 4.1.1. Promoting Social Harmony

Face theory plays a key role in fostering social harmony in Chinese culture. Given the cultural emphasis on collectivism and harmonious interpersonal relationships, face as a vital social capital effectively maintains group harmony [12]. By preserving face, individuals can avoid direct conflicts and awkwardness, thus sustaining harmonious relations in social interactions. For example, using ambiguous expressions like “Guo Liang Tian”, individuals can avoid direct refusals while preserving the other’s face, reducing potential conflicts and tension. This strategy significantly lowers interpersonal tension in family and work settings, promoting smoother and more harmonious interactions.

Additionally, face culture helps maintain social order by encouraging individuals to adhere to etiquette and norms, reducing uncivil behavior and conflict. In public affairs and community life, face culture strengthens individual commitment to social norms and collective interests, promoting cooperation and coordination among community members. For instance, in community activities and public decision-making, giving others face fosters cooperation and consensus, enhancing community cohesion and harmony. Face also serves as an essential mediation tool, helping conflicting parties find face-saving solutions, thus resolving disputes and restoring harmony. In family conflicts, elders often use the concept of face to mediate and reconcile differences, restoring harmony. This approach not only maintains family harmony but also helps reduce conflict and opposition at a broader social level.

By emphasizing the value and importance of face, individuals in social interactions are more mindful of others’ feelings and dignity, fostering harmonious relationships. This cultural trait is significant in both private and public spheres, contributing to the construction of a more harmonious and stable society.

### 4.1.2. Maintaining Personal Dignity

Face in Chinese culture is not only the cornerstone of social harmony but also an essential component of personal dignity. Preserving face helps individuals gain respect and recognition in society, enhancing their sense of self-worth [8]. This sense of dignity positively impacts individuals’ mental health and social adaptation. For instance, in the workplace, by appropriately maintaining face, employees can gain the respect of colleagues and superiors, increasing job satisfaction and work efficiency. In social settings, maintaining face also boosts confidence and social skills, fostering more positive social interactions.

The face culture reinforces personal responsibility and social norms, further promoting the maintenance of personal dignity. Individuals, when facing social evaluation, pay more attention to their behavior to avoid negative impacts on themselves and their families. This sense of responsibility encourages individuals to be more cautious and responsible in social interactions, thereby establishing a good personal image and enhancing social recognition and trust.

In the family environment, the face culture also plays a role in protecting and

enhancing personal dignity. Elders typically teach children how to maintain their face in social settings, which not only preserves the culture of face but also fosters personal dignity. Through such family education, individuals learn from an early age how to protect and enhance their dignity in various situations, better preparing them for social life and helping them build healthy interpersonal relationships as adults.

#### **4.1.3. Facilitating Indirect Communication**

Face culture encourages indirect communication, which has clear advantages in certain situations. Indirect communication helps avoid direct confrontation and opposition, making interactions softer and more tactful, suitable for handling complex and sensitive social contexts [2]. For example, among family or friends, using vague time expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” allows individuals to express their intentions without hurting the other’s feelings. This strategy is particularly effective in resolving potential conflicts, as it allows parties to reach a consensus without losing face, thus maintaining relationship stability.

Moreover, indirect communication plays a positive role in formal settings. In business negotiations and international exchanges, indirect expressions can avoid misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences, making it easier for parties to find common ground and reach mutually beneficial agreements. This communication style emphasizes understanding and compromise, helping to establish and maintain long-term cooperative relationships. Indirect communication also proves valuable in education and the workplace. Teachers and managers can more effectively convey suggestions and criticisms through indirect feedback, avoiding the embarrassment and resistance that direct criticism might cause. This approach makes it easier for recipients to accept and improve their behavior, fostering a positive and supportive learning and working environment.

## **4.2. Disadvantages**

### **4.2.1. Potential for Communication Barriers**

Although face culture helps avoid direct conflicts, overemphasis on face and indirect communication can lead to poor information transmission and misunderstandings. In some cases, vague expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” may be misunderstood as uncertainty or irresponsibility, affecting communication effectiveness [1]. For instance, in business collaborations, ambiguous responses may cause project delays or cooperation failures. In family relationships, such vague communication might lead to misunderstandings, impacting trust and understanding among family members.

In team settings, excessive reliance on indirect communication can hinder effective collaboration and coordination. Team members may refrain from speaking directly to avoid damaging others’ face, leading to unresolved critical issues that impact project progress and team efficiency. This communication barrier not only delays work but also can cause internal conflicts, weakening team cohe-

sion. In the education sector, communication between students and teachers can also be affected by the culture of face. Students might avoid asking questions or expressing doubts for fear of losing face, which can diminish learning outcomes. Similarly, if teachers provide overly gentle feedback, students might not fully grasp the critique, hindering their improvement and development. In cross-cultural exchanges, the indirect communication style inherent in the culture of face can lead to misunderstandings and distrust among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For those accustomed to direct communication, indirect expressions may appear opaque or insincere, thereby affecting international cooperation and exchanges.

While the face culture has its advantages in promoting social harmony and reducing direct conflicts, over-reliance on indirect communication can lead to information gaps and misunderstandings, negatively impacting communication across various fields.

#### **4.2.2. Increased Psychological Pressure**

Excessive focus on face can impose additional psychological pressure and burden on individuals. Constantly maintaining face in social interactions to avoid the negative consequences of losing face can affect mental health [13]. For example, in the workplace, employees might fear losing face and thus refrain from expressing reasonable opinions or needs, impacting work performance and personal development. In family and friendships, this pressure can prevent individuals from genuinely expressing their feelings and needs, affecting mental health and relationship quality.

Furthermore, an excessive focus on face can lead individuals to adopt avoidance strategies when facing failure and setbacks. To avoid losing face, individuals might hide problems or shift blame, hindering personal growth and potentially causing greater issues for the team or organization. Prolonged psychological pressure can also lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems, severely impacting one's quality of life and work efficiency. Therefore, an over-emphasis on face not only brings psychological pressure in social interactions but also negatively affects mental health and interpersonal relationships.

#### **4.2.3. Hindrance to Genuine Communication**

The indirect and implicit nature of face culture can hinder genuine communication and effective interactions. In overemphasizing face, individuals might not honestly express their true thoughts and feelings, leading to superficial and insincere relationships [14]. For example, in family relationships, communication between parents and children might lack depth and authenticity due to face concerns, impacting the development of close relationships. In the workplace, overemphasis on face might lead to a lack of effective communication and cooperation among team members, affecting work efficiency and team cohesion. In the medical field, the culture of face can lead patients to withhold accurate information about their condition, fearing exposure of privacy or appearing igno-

rant, which can affect diagnosis and treatment outcomes. Doctors, too, might avoid directly addressing health issues out of concern for the patient's face, potentially delaying treatment and worsening outcomes. In public affairs and policy-making, the culture of face can also pose problems. Decision-makers may avoid admitting mistakes or adjusting policies to maintain their face, resulting in the continuation of flawed decisions and waste of resources. In community activities, residents might be reluctant to participate in open discussions or express genuine opinions due to concerns about face, undermining the democratic nature and effectiveness of community decisions.

#### **4.2.4. Increasing Social Inequity**

The culture of face plays a significant role in Chinese society, but its negative impacts cannot be ignored, especially regarding resource distribution and opportunity acquisition. To preserve individual or group face, biases in resource allocation become common. Leaders might prioritize resources for those with close relationships or who support them, neglecting those with true talent and contributions. This unfair distribution mechanism not only wastes resources but also demotivates capable individuals. In the workplace, subordinates may gain promotions through flattery rather than actual performance, leading to decreased overall efficiency. Similarly, in education, schools and parents may use connections and privileges to secure better educational resources for their children, depriving others of fair competition. The culture of face heavily relies on social networks; those with extensive connections can access more resources and opportunities, while those without connections, despite their abilities, may struggle to gain deserved opportunities [15]. This network-based resource allocation exacerbates social inequity. In decision-making processes, the culture of face may introduce biases, leading to irrational or unfair decisions.

### **5. Strategies to Avoid Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings Due to “Guo Liang Tian” in Face Theory**

In cross-cultural communication, the expression “Guo Liang Tian” based on face theory can lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers. To avoid these cross-cultural pitfalls, the following strategies can be implemented:

#### **5.1. Enhancing Cultural Sensitivity**

Understanding and respecting the other party's culture is key to avoiding cross-cultural misunderstandings. Cultural sensitivity involves a deep understanding and respect for the values, customs, and behaviors of different cultures. For those unfamiliar with face culture, explaining the cultural background and meaning of expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” can help them grasp the true intention and avoid misunderstandings [2]. Through cultural training and accumulated cross-cultural experience, individuals can improve their cultural sensitivity, better understanding and adapting to different communication styles. For example, in a multicultural work environment, organizing cultural exchange

workshops can help employees appreciate and respect each other's cultural backgrounds, facilitating smoother cross-cultural communication.

### **5.2. Specifying Exact Times**

In formal settings or important matters, providing more specific times and arrangements can avoid the ambiguity and uncertainty associated with “Guo Liang Tian”. Clear timings and schedules can reduce misunderstandings and improve efficiency and decision-making timeliness. For instance, in a business meeting, clearly stating specific dates and times, such as “We can discuss this on Wednesday at 10 am”, can minimize misunderstandings and delays caused by vague expressions [1]. This approach respects the other party's need for precise scheduling while maintaining effective communication.

### **5.3. Double Confirmation**

Using double confirmation can effectively prevent misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, especially when important decisions or collaborations are involved. Double confirmation involves reiterating the details of discussions through email or written documents after verbal communication. This ensures that both parties have a consistent understanding of the timing and arrangements, providing formal records to reduce issues caused by communication breakdowns [2]. For example, in international project collaboration, project managers can send meeting minutes after the meeting, detailing the discussed content and decisions, ensuring all participants have a unified understanding and expectations of the project's progress.

### **5.4. Building Trusting Relationships**

Building trust is fundamental to avoiding cross-cultural misunderstandings. Establishing trust requires time and continuous interaction, where genuine communication and cooperation gradually build mutual trust, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences [12]. On the foundation of trust, even ambiguous expressions like “Guo Liang Tian” can be understood correctly, with both parties clarifying specific arrangements through communication. Building trust not only resolves current communication issues but also lays a solid foundation for future cooperation. For instance, in multinational companies, team-building activities can enhance understanding and trust among employees, significantly improving the efficiency and effectiveness of cross-cultural teams.

### **5.5. Flexibly Adjusting Communication Strategies**

Flexibly adjusting communication strategies according to specific contexts is also crucial for avoiding cross-cultural misunderstandings. When communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, adapting to their cultural characteristics by using either direct or indirect communication methods as ap-

appropriate can be beneficial. For example, when interacting with Westerners who prefer direct communication, increasing clarity and directness can reduce ambiguity and uncertainty [9]. This flexibility helps meet the communication needs of different cultures, enhancing the effectiveness of exchanges. Conversely, when dealing with high-context cultures, more indirect expressions can be used to respect their cultural habits. For instance, in international meetings, adjusting communication methods according to the participants' cultural backgrounds ensures the accuracy and effectiveness of information transmission.

By enhancing cultural sensitivity, specifying exact times, employing double confirmation, building trusting relationships, and flexibly adjusting communication strategies, cross-cultural misunderstandings due to "Guo Liang Tian" can be effectively avoided. These strategies help better understand and adapt to different cultural communication styles, promoting smooth and effective cross-cultural exchanges and reducing misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences. In today's globalized world, cross-cultural communication is an inevitable and crucial issue. Through continuous learning and adaptation, better cooperation and development can be achieved in a multicultural environment [16].

## 6. Conclusions

Through the social psychological analysis of the expression "Guo Liang Tian", particularly from the perspective of face theory, we gain a deeper understanding of its connotations and functions within Chinese culture. Face theory explains the critical role of "Guo Liang Tian" in maintaining social harmony and personal dignity. In Chinese culture, face is not only a symbol of personal social status and prestige but also a vital factor in maintaining interpersonal relationships and social order. By using ambiguous time expressions like "Guo Liang Tian", individuals can tactfully avoid potential conflicts and embarrassment without directly rejecting requests, thus preserving their own and others' face. This communication style reflects the high value placed on interpersonal harmony in Chinese culture and the dual need for face and social harmony in social interactions.

The practical application of "Guo Liang Tian" within the framework of face theory reveals its social psychological functions and the potential challenges in cross-cultural communication. While this ambiguous expression is widely accepted and effectively functions within Chinese culture, it can cause misunderstandings and communication barriers in cross-cultural exchanges, especially with cultures that favor direct communication. To avoid these cross-cultural pitfalls, enhancing cultural sensitivity and adjusting communication strategies are crucial. Specifying exact times, employing double confirmation, and building trusting relationships can effectively reduce misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, facilitating smoother and more efficient cross-cultural communication. Additionally, flexibly adjusting communication strategies based on

specific contexts and the cultural background of the other party can significantly enhance the effectiveness and accuracy of communication.

Overall, the expression “Guo Liang Tian” is not merely a vague reference to future time but also reflects the high value placed on face and social harmony in Chinese culture. Face theory provides a robust framework for understanding the social psychological functions of this expression and its application and challenges in different cultural contexts. This understanding not only aids in the effective use of this expression in daily life but also offers valuable strategies and methods for cross-cultural communication. In the context of globalization, improving cross-cultural understanding and communication skills is crucial for promoting cooperation and exchange between different cultures. Therefore, an in-depth study of the expression “Guo Liang Tian” and its underlying cultural connotations enriches the theoretical framework of social psychology and cultural studies and provides practical guidance for real-world cross-cultural communication.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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