**上海外国语大学 2020 –2021学年第一学期**

**期末考试试卷**

课程名称 中国文化概要

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**Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.**

***Guanxi* Culture in China**

Sun Xiaoguo, a notorious convict of multiple high-profile crimes in China, was executed in southwest China's Yunnan Province in February 2020.

Sun Xiaoguo was given a death sentence in the 1990s but was discovered living as a free man outside of prison as the alleged head of a criminal gang. Followed the announcement of the ruling were various TV news commentary shows and what impressed me most was a comment made by an anchor in an in-depth covering of the news. He said the reason why Sun Xiaoguo’s parents, whose positions were only civil servants at the primary level, could help their son get away with the death penalty was thought-provoking. The answer to the question is not because their positions were high or powerful, but because their networks of “*guanxi*” was so strong and profound that they could be easily accessible to those who can manipulate things using their privileges.

The news about Sun Xiaoguo made me start to ponder on “*guanxi*”, an interesting cultural phenomenon in China and a crucial system of beliefs in [Chinese culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_culture" \o "Chinese culture).

The Wikipedia defines *guanxi* the fundamental dynamic in personalized [social networks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network" \o "Social network) of power. A society built on *guanxi* culture could be called a “renqing” society. Due to its being directly translated as "connections," “*guanxi*” is often misunderstood as the relationship between two people, yet it is better understood as the way that a web of relations or circle of influence impacts relations between two people. At its most basic, *guanxi* describes a personal connection between two people in which one is able to prevail upon another to perform a favor or service, or vice versa. Based on your *guanxi*, things could be done more easily and smoother, which is regarded as a favor gained by “renqing” between people.

The *guanxi* culture is deeply rooted in the [Confucian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism" \o "Confucianism) doctrine, which sees the individual as part of a community and a set of family, hierarchical and friendly relationships. Chinese culture borrows much of its practices from Confucianism, which emphases collectivism and long-term personal relations. Therefore, one party would perform a favor to the other party for the sake of the harmonious relationship. Besides, the Chinese traditional culture also plays an important role in shaping the *guanxi* culture. Chinese people have long attached great importance to interpersonal relationship, kinship and the cohesion between the family and nation. “Renqing” becomes a bond between individuals, which is not only applied to interpersonal relationship but also the society as a whole.

However, *guanxi* culture brings ethical concerns when it is abused or misused. *Guanxi* could turn to be a negative word when it bring harms to individuals, the society and the nation, sometimes even related to corruption and crime. Sun’s case is undoubtedly a critical example of abusing *guanxi*. ‘When a ‘shuren’ (which means your close friend) come to you for help’, Sun’s mother said, ‘your capability to perform a favor to your shuren could earn you respect’. Nineteen defendants, mainly civil servants, were sentenced to jail terms of various lengths for ties to Sun's case

If *guanxi* is a common and pervasive phenomenon in China, *guanxi* culture in western countries is much more implicit and scarce where people talk more about rules and capital. As far as I am concerned, *guanxi* exists in everywhere from a small community to the whole human society, whereas a vital difference is the power of *guanxi* in the society. Is it strong enough to override the contracts, rules and laws? Is it worth it to deviate from the virtue and ethics?

It may be fair enough to regard China as a “renqing” society build on networks of *guanxi*, which is shaped by Confucius doctrine and Chinese traditional culture. While *guanxi* could turn from a neutral, benign word to a negative, corruptive word if it is abused. What we need is the respect to the rule, the law and order. Indeed, there is still a long way to go for us to build a society rule of law rather than rule of *guanxi*.