Research Paper

Politeness in requests in Chinese reality show: The influence of gender and social status

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ABSTRACT *Politeness is an important concern in communications, especially in face-threatening acts such as making requests. Gender and social status are two prominent factors determining the use of politeness strategies. This paper aims to investigate the influence of gender and social status on requests in Chinese reality show. A total of 441 requests were collected from the Chinese reality show Back to Field, 228 from the male group and 213 from the female group. The results showed that the male group preferred making bald-on-record requests and showed a higher level of politeness when talking with superior individuals. The female group preferred using indirect request strategies, especially conventionally-indirect ones to display politeness. With the elevation of the status of the recipients, both males and females produced more indirect requests. Additionally, males produced more modifiers than females. The study provided new insights into research on politeness in requests in the Chinese context.*
KEYWORDS: *Requests, Politeness, Gender, Social status, Reality show*

I. INTRODUCTION

Requests are not only highly ubiquitous but also one of the most extensively researched speech acts in pragmatics. As a universal social phenomenon, politeness plays a crucial role in accomplishing communicative goals and maintaining harmonious relationships. Since the speech act of requesting is intrinsically face-threatening, the requester may take redressive actions to mitigate threats to face and show politeness so as to achieve the best communication effect. Maintaining politeness is a complicated issue in any language since it is influenced by an intricate web of factors, such as national culture, ethnicity, gender, social status, and age. To date, many researchers have examined the influence of social status [1] and [2] or gender [3] and [4] on the realization of requests. However, few studies have investigated the interaction between social status and gender when making requests. Thus far, most studies have explored the realization of requests, focusing on cross-cultural comparison [5] and [6] or the request strategies used in a specific language or culture [7] and [8]. However, data from reality shows has seldom been examined in previous studies on Chinese requests.

Based on the above research gaps, the current study collected requests from the Chinese reality show *Back to Field* as data. Requesters were classified into two groups based on gender. The study analyzed the production of request strategies, external modifications and internal modifications to find out whether there are any similarities or differences across the two gender groups when making requests to recipients of different social ranks. The study has practical significance as it enriches people's understanding of the influence of social status and gender on requests in daily interactions and helps them make more appropriate linguistic choices when making requests to interlocutors of different gender and social status. It may shed new insights into request research and politeness theory.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Politeness theory and requests

From Brown and Levinson's [9] perspective, politeness is the effort to redress any potential threat to an individual's face in interaction. According to them, 'face' can be categorized into two forms: positive face and negative face. There are mainly four types of strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Later, Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper [10] divided request strategy into three types (i.e. direct

strategy, conventionally-indirect strategy and non-conventionally-indirect strategy) according to the scale of directness. Additionally, redressive action was split into internal modification and external modification according to whether it was used inside or outside the speech act utterance proper.

Request is classified as a directive speech act [11]. The requester requires the requestee to act for the requester's own interests [12]. The speech act of requesting inevitably threatens the requestee's face and encroaches on the requestee's freedom. There is an urgent demand for the requester to minimize the imposition by linguistic structures and patterns. So far, many studies centering on cross-cultural comparisons [5] and [6] have been conducted. In addition, researchers have investigated the realization patterns of requests in a particular language [7] and [8]. Some previous studies have also particularly examined requests in Chinese culture. For instance, through discourse completion-tasks (DCTs), Lee-Wong [13] discovered that direct strategies were the most popular strategy and 'mood-derivable' was the most frequently used sub-strategy. By examining the emails sent by Chinese postgraduates, Zhu [14] revealed that direct request strategies were most frequently used, and 'want statement' was the favourite sub-strategy. Nonetheless, the opposite conclusion has been shown in some other studies. For example, based on DCTs, Zhang [15] proposed that Chinese speakers favoured conventionally indirect request strategies most. Using DCTs, Zhang and Wang [16] also found that conventionally indirect strategy was highly valued and regarded as the most polite strategy in Chinese.

The review of the literature shows that what request structures and linguistic patterns the Chinese requesters prefer most are still under discussion. In addition, most studies so far have adopted DCTs to collect data. Data from other resources is required for research on requests in Chinese. Thus, further exploration is needed.

2.2. Gender and social status

Requests are socially sensitive acts. A large body of research has investigated gender and politeness both in written and spoken interaction. For instance, García [3] examined gender similarities and differences between Peruvian Spanish participants when making requests and responding to them. Nevertheless, the results revealed that the difference was not significant. In contrast, Macaulay [17] found that in a special register 'interviewing', the female interviewers preferred using indirect request strategies than the male interviewers did.

Aside from gender, several studies have investigated the effect of social status on requests. Using DCTs, Shafran [2] explored the influence of social status on the directness of requests and found that speakers used fewer direct requests but more indirect requests when the status of the hearer went from lower to higher than the speaker. Some previous studies have contributed to this issue by examining requests in the Chinese language. For example, Chen and Chen [18] explored the influence of status on requests among Taiwanese EFL learners. The findings demonstrated that when interlocutors were of equal status, indirect request strategy was obviously preferred, and when the requester was of lower social status than the requestee, indirect strategy was still preferred but at a lower frequency. In addition, Chen et al. [19] discovered that even though conventionally indirect strategies were preferred in Chinese, direct strategies were preferable when speakers were making requests to equal social status interlocutors or intimate ones. Liu, Li and Ren [20] investigated requests made by Chinese people on social media and found that social status did affect their use of modifications.

Up till now, much research has been carried out to explore the separate influence of gender and social status on the realization of requests. However, the interplay between gender and social status has not yet received adequate attention. Therefore, the present study is designed to investigate the possible influence of gender and social status in the ways that requests are realized by contemporary Chinese speakers in Chinese reality show. It is hoped that the study could assist people in making requests courteously and appropriately in real-life conversations.

The current paper addresses the following three research questions:

(1) When making requests to recipients of different social status, do the two groups perform request strategies differently? If so, in what aspects?

(2) When making requests to recipients of different social status, do the two groups perform internal modifications differently? If so, in what aspects?

(3) When making requests to recipients of different social status, do the two groups perform external modifications differently? If so, in what aspects?

III.   METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection

Requests in *Back to Field*, Seasons 1-5 were collected as the research data. *Back to Field* is a Chinese reality show showcasing the real lifestyle of living away from the bustling city centers. It has already run for five seasons since 2017. Each season has a permanent cast and different guests join the cast in each episode. Requesters were classified into two groups based on gender. In total, the data consisted of 452 authentic requests, 251 from the male group and 201 from the female group. Additionally, the participants in *Back to Field* are all

public figures. Some seniors who made their debut early and have won many awards so far are respectable and well-known and can therefore be regarded as social superiors. Some juniors who have just made their debut are inexperienced and relatively not quite famous and can therefore be regarded as social inferiors. In addition, some participants who are social equals were included as well. In short, the study consisted of three situations, namely, making requests to interlocutors of higher, equal, and lower social status. It investigated the male group's and the female group's use of request strategies, external modifications and internal modifications when making requests to people of different social status. Overall, 177 requests were collected in the S (speaker) > H (hearer) context, 143 requests in the S = H context and 121 requests in the S < H context.

3.2. Data analysis

The data coding scheme in this study was based on the classification made by Blum-Kulka et al. [10]. The data were analyzed from three dimensions, i.e. request strategy, internal modification and external modification. According to the level of directness, request strategies were categorized into direct request, conventionally indirect request and non-conventionally indirect request strategies (see Table 1). Internal modification here was categorized into syntactic downgrader and lexical/phrasal downgrader (see Table 2). In the aspect of external modification, mitigating supportive move, aggravating supportive move, and alerter were involved (see Table 3).

The study categorized the dataset with the help of NVivo (version 12). All the data were coded by two researchers to ensure inter-rater reliability. The two researchers reached an agreement of 90.89% and then discussed controversial samples and achieved a consensus on the final results. Relationships between variables were assessed by Pearson's Chi-square test. When more than 20% of the cells have expected counts less than 5, Fisher's Exact test was used instead. P-value < .05 was considered as significant.

Table 1 Request strategies

Strategies	Examples
Direct requests	
Mood-derivable	把碗放到这里。(Put the bowl here.)
Obligation statement	你*必须*帮我们搬树。(You *must* help us move the tree.)
Want statement	我也*想*吃那个鱼汤。(I also *want* that fish soup.)
Conventionally indirect requests	
Suggestory formula	*要不要*和我一起剥蒜?
(a suggestion to hearer)	(*How about* peeling the garlic with me?)
Query preparatory	您*可以*教我一下这个怎么做吗?
(a reference to preparatory conditions)	(*Can you* show me how to do this?)
Non-conventionally indirect requests	
Hint	这里有点脏。
(containing partial or no reference to the request or any its element)	(A bit dirty here.)

Table 2 Internal modifications

Internal modifications	Examples
Syntactic downgraders	
Interrogative	门要不要关上? (Should the door be closed?)
Embedded 'if' clause	*如果你可以*…… (*If you can...*)
Lexical/phrasal downgraders	
Understater (minimization of the effort)	可以借*一下*您的松香吗?
	(Can I borrow your rosin *for a while*?)
Downtoner (sentence final particles)	吧/呀/嘛
Politeness device	请 (please), 麻烦 (bother)
Appealer (question tags)	可以吗? (Is that OK?)

Table 3 External modifications

External modifications	Examples
Mitigating supportive move	
Disarmer	打扰了。
(indicating the awareness of a potential offence)	(I'm sorry to interrupt.)
Grounder	真的好沉。
(expressing reasons for the action)	(It is really heavy.)
Cost minimizer	只有几排了。
(minimizing the cost to the hearer)	(Only a few rows left.)
Preparator	你要是有时间……
(checking on the availability of the compliance)	(If you have time...)
Sweetener	我真的会很感谢你。
(expressing appreciation and praise)	(I would really appreciate it.)
Aggravating supportive move	
Repetition of the head act	记得…… (Please remember to...)
Urging	快一点。 (Hurry up!)
Alerters	
Attention getter	哎呀！(Oops.)
Address term	Full name, family name, given name, etc.

IV.   RESULTS

4.1. Request strategies

The frequencies and percentages of request strategies used by the two gender groups when making requests to recipients of different power status levels are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Frequency and percentage of request strategies across different social status and gender

Strategies	S > H				S = H				S < H			
	M		F		M		F		M		F	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Direct	**85**	**91.4**	**62**	**73.8**	**60**	**82.2**	**40**	**57.1**	**28**	**45.2**	**21**	**35.6**
Mood-derivable	83	89.2	58	69.0	58	79.5	37	52.9	24	38.7	11	18.6
Obligation statement	1	1.1	1	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.7
Want statement	1	1.1	3	3.6	2	2.7	3	4.3	4	6.5	9	15.3
Conventionally indirect	**7**	**7.5**	**9**	**10.7**	**8**	**11.0**	**23**	**32.9**	**23**	**37.1**	**22**	**37.3**
Suggestory formula	3	3.2	4	4.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	6.5	8	13.6
Query preparatory	4	4.3	5	6.0	8	11.0	23	32.9	19	30.6	14	23.7
Non-conventionally indirect	**1**	**1.1**	**13**	**15.5**	**5**	**6.8**	**7**	**10.0**	**11**	**17.7**	**16**	**27.1**
Total	**93**	**100**	**84**	**100**	**73**	**100**	**70**	**100**	**62**	**100**	**59**	**100**
χ²		13.712				11.534				1.875		
p - value		0.001**				0.002**				0.414		

Note. f = frequency, **p < .01

According to Pearson's Chi-square test, the difference between the male group and the female group when making requests to interlocutors of lower social status reached significance ($\chi^2 = 13.712$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.001$). Although the two groups showed a similar preference for the sub-strategy 'mood-derivable' under the direct request strategy, which echoed the prior studies [13] and [21], males employed 'mood-derivable' to a much higher extent than females. In Example 1, the male speaker used imperative to directly request the hearer to do the things he needed. The way of requesting is relatively more efficient but less polite.

Example 1. Direct strategy (the male group)
xxx，带着弟弟妹妹划着船到对面，把树苗往这边运，好吧？
xxx, take your brother and sister, row to the opposite side and transport the saplings this way, OK?

In addition, it can be seen from Table 4 that in S > H context, direct request strategy was more prevalent in requests made by males (91.4%) than by females (73.8%), but conventionally indirect strategy and non-conventionally indirect request strategy were more prevalent in requests made by females (10.7% and 15.5%) than by males (7.5% and 1.1%). For instance, in Example 2, the female speaker used 'hint' to reach the highest level of indirectness. The speaker did not mention the request at all, but the utterance was still interpretable to the hearer. In the specific context, the recipient was able to realize that the speaker wanted him to hold her up on the downhill.

Example 2. Non-conventionally indirect request strategy (the female group)
我有点恐高，xxx。
I'm a bit scared of heights, xxx.

When interlocutors were of equal status, Pearson's Chi-square test showed a significant difference in the use of request strategy between the two groups ($χ^2$ = 11.534, df = 2, p = 0.002). Males made more direct requests but less conventionally indirect requests and non-conventionally indirect requests than their female counterparts in this context.
When the speakers were in a position of lower status than the recipients, Pearson's Chi-square test revealed that the difference in the use of request strategy between the two groups did not reach significance ($χ^2$ = 1.875, df = 2, p = 0.414). Although males maintained their preference for direct request, they use more indirect strategies when communicating with someone of higher status than they did when communicating with someone of lower and equal status. Conventionally indirect requests accounted for a similar proportion of requests made by the two groups and the sub-strategy 'query preparatory' was the second most frequently used for both groups. For instance, in Example 3, instead of directly making a request to the hearer who was superior in social status, the speaker asked about the hearer's willingness, and thereby, successfully fulfilled the realization of the request in an indirect and polite way.

Example 3. Conventionally indirect request strategy (the female group)
您去拍照的时候可以叫我吗？
Can you call me when you are going to take photos?

4.3. Internal modifications
Table 5 describes the frequencies and percentages of internal modifications by the male group and the female group when making requests to recipients of different social ranks.

Table 5 Frequency and percentage of internal modifications across different social status and gender

Internal modifications	S > H				S = H				S < H			
	M		F		M		F		M		F	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Syntactic downgraders	**18**	**32.1**	**18**	**35.3**	**8**	**18.2**	**17**	**30.9**	**25**	**39.7**	**29**	**59.2**
Interrogative	15	26.8	17	33.3	8	18.2	17	30.9	25	39.7	28	57.1
Embedded 'if' clause	3	5.4	1	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.0
Lexical/phrasal downgraders	**38**	**67.9**	**33**	**64.7**	**36**	**81.8**	**38**	**69.1**	**38**	**60.3**	**20**	**40.8**
Understater	9	16.1	10	19.6	21	47.7	19	34.5	14	22.2	8	16.3
Downtoner	8	14.3	11	21.6	7	15.9	10	18.2	7	11.1	5	10.2
Politeness device	11	19.6	10	19.6	8	18.2	5	9.1	11	17.5	3	6.1
Appealer	10	17.9	2	3.9	0	0	4	7.3	6	9.5	4	8.2
Total	**56**	**100**	**51**	**100**	**44**	**100**	**55**	**100**	**63**	**100**	**49**	**100**
$χ^2$		**0.119**				**2.098**				**4.198**		
p - value		**0.838**				**0.169**				**0.056**		

Note. f = frequency

As shown in Table 5, many internal mitigators were used by both groups when making requests. The result was consistent with the previous studies [13]. Pearson's Chi-square test indicated that the difference in the usage of internal modification between the two groups did not reach significance in all three contexts ($\chi^2 = 0.119$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.838$ in the S > H context; $\chi^2 = 2.098$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.169$ in the S = H context; $\chi^2 = 4.198$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.056$ in the S < H context).

Syntactically, 'interrogative' was the most frequently used downgrader by both groups at all power status levels. Concerning lexical/phrasal downgraders, 'understaters', such as "一会儿 (for a while)", 'downtoners', such as "吧 (ba)" and 'politeness devices', such as "麻烦 (bother)", "劳烦 (trouble)" and "请 (please)" were favoured by two groups when making requests to recipients of equal social status. In addition, females preferred

using 'understaters', 'downtoners' and 'politeness devices' and males preferred using 'downtoners', 'politeness devices' and 'appealers' when interacting with someone of lower social status. In the S < H context, 'understaters', 'downtoners' and 'appealers' were frequently employed by females and 'understaters', 'downtoners' and 'politeness devices' were frequently employed by males. Chinese speakers' greater preference for 'downtoners', 'politeness markers' and 'appealers' was consistent with the prior studies [21].

4.4. External modifications

Table 6 presents the frequencies and percentages of external modifications employed by the two groups.

Table 6 Frequency and percentage of external modifications across different social status and gender

External modifications	S > H				S = H				S < H			
	M		F		M		F		M		F	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Mitigating supportive move	**17**	**22.4**	**11**	**25.6**	**11**	**21.2**	**8**	**34.8**	**8**	**17.0**	**5**	**26.3**
Disarmer	2	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	0	0
Grounder	5	6.6	10	23.3	9	17.3	5	21.7	6	12.8	3	15.8
Cost minimizer	3	4.0	0	0	2	3.9	3	13.0	0	0	0	0
Preparator	4	5.3	1	2.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5.3
Sweetener	3	4.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	1	5.3
Aggravating supportive move	**8**	**10.5**	**7**	**16.3**	**9**	**17.3**	**5**	**21.7**	**8**	**17.0**	**0**	**0**
Repetition of the head act	1	1.3	1	2.3	2	3.9	1	4.3	1	2.1	0	0
Urging	7	9.2	6	14.0	7	13.5	4	17.4	7	14.9	0	0
Alerter	**51**	**67.1**	**25**	**58.1**	**32**	**61.5**	**10**	**43.5**	**31**	**66.0**	**14**	**73.7**
Attention getter	1	1.3	3	7.0	2	3.8	0	0	2	4.3	0	0
Address term	**50**	**65.7**	**22**	**51.2**	**30**	**57.7**	**10**	**43.5**	**29**	**61.7**	**14**	**73.7**
Full name	2	2.6	6	14.0	3	5.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Given name	8	10.5	3	7.0	7	13.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family name	16	21.1	2	4.7	2	3.9	0	0	0	0	1	5.3
Job title	1	1.3	3	7.0	8	15.4	1	4.3	15	31.9	11	57.9
Kinship term	13	17.1	1	2.3	9	17.3	8	34.8	14	29.8	2	10.5
Endearment	2	2.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nickname	8	10.5	7	16.3	1	1.9	1	4.3	0	0	0	0
Total	**76**	**100**	**43**	**100**	**52**	**100**	**23**	**100**	**47**	**100**	**19**	**100**
χ^2		1.187				2.266				4.010		

p - value	0.515	0.343	0.135

Note. f = frequency

Both male and female speakers produced a number of external modifiers when interacting with recipients of different social status. Pearson's Chi-square test indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups when making requests to recipients of lower social status ($\chi^2 = 1.187$, *df* = 2, *p* = 0.515) and equal social status ($\chi^2 = 2.266$, *df* = 2, *p* = 0.343). Fisher's Exact test showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups when making requests to interlocutors of higher social status ($\chi^2 = 4.010$, *p* = 0.135).

With respect to mitigating supportive move, the device 'grounder', by which the requester explains the reason for his or her action, was the favourite for both genders. Chinese speakers' preference for 'grounder' when making requests was in line with the former studies [15]. As Example 4 shows, the speaker first explained why she needed the hearer's help, i.e. because the thing was heavy, and then made a request. The 'grounder' made the request more reasonable and acceptable.

Example 4. Grounder (the female group)
*真的好沉，*你能帮我一下吗？
It's really heavy, can you help me?

One point to consider is the use of aggravating supportive moves by the two groups. Aggravating supportive moves accounted for 17% of the requests made by the male group when males were talking to higher-status interlocutors. However, the female group did not use this device at all. Example 5 is an instance of aggravating supportive move produced by males. The speaker first emphasized his fast speed and then urged the hearer to execute the action faster. The urging here inevitably aggravated the request force.

Example 5. Urging (the male group)
我的速度超过地心引力的速度了，你得扔得更快了。
My speed is faster than gravity. You have to throw it faster.

Alerters were heavily used by the two groups (114 instances by males and 49 instances by females). Among them, 'address term' was the most frequently used external modification device by both genders. To be specific, males preferred using 'family name', such as "小张 (Xiao Zhang)", 'kinship term', such as "妹妹 (sister)", 'given name', such as "艺兴 (Yixing)", 'nickname', such as "小岩石 (Xiaoyanshi)" when making requests to people who were inferior in status. Meanwhile, females preferred using 'full name', such as "彭昱畅 (Peng Yuchang)" and 'nickname' to address the requestees of lower status. When interacting with the equals, males favoured 'given name', 'kinship term' and 'job title', such as "黄老师 (Teacher Huang)", and females favoured 'kinship term' which accounted for 34.8% of the external modifiers made by themselves. When making requests to interlocutors who had higher social status, males still preferred using 'job title' and 'kinship term'. For females, over half of the external modifiers were realized by 'job title'.

V. DISCUSSION

This study has explored the effect of gender and its interaction with social status on Chinese requests from three dimensions, i.e. request strategy, internal and external modification. The first research question explored the differences in request strategy between the two groups when making requests to recipients of different social status. The findings revealed that direct request is the favourite request strategy for males in all three contexts and for females excluding the S < H context. With the elevation of the status of the recipients, both males and females produced more indirect requests. Partington [22] argued that the greater the relative social status of the hearer over the speaker, the higher level of politeness is needed. Regardless of gender, Chinese speakers appeared to be more cautious and polite when talking with hearers who had a higher social status in the present study. The findings of the current study supported the view of previous empirical studies that females show more politeness than males in making requests [9] and [23]. Although directness was preferred by both groups when interacting with interlocutors of lower and equal social status, females showed a greater preference for indirect request strategies than males. When making requests to superior recipients, the female group shifted their favourite strategy from direct request to conventionally indirect request. Tannen [24] pointed out that male communications are directed by status, whereas female communications are directed by affiliation. The findings might be attributed to the fact that females' linguistic performance is often shown as uncertainty and hesitation which results in presenting negative politeness towards others [25]. Especially when talking with someone with higher status, females pay greater attention to the interlocutor's feelings and

sometimes even protect the recipient's face at the expense of their own will. For females, language is more an expression of concern for the feelings of interlocutors [26]. In contrast, males perceive language as a means of r exchanging information. As a result, the males favoured direct strategies to make requests as briefly and efficiently as possible. The females favoured conventionally indirect request to lighten illocutionary force and avoid threatening the requestees' faces.

The second research question concerned the differences in the use of internal modifications. Internal modifiers played an important role in making requests. The two groups produced a similar number of internal modifiers and no significant difference was observed. Han [27] noted that the choice of modifications is determined to some degree by the social variables of power. However, the current study's findings demonstrated that internal modifiers were frequently used at all three social status levels. Ren and Fukushima [28] pointed out that a request, whether direct or indirect, without mitigating device, was regarded as demanding and uncomfortable by most Chinese speakers. However, if a request was conducted with mitigations, it was considered as polite and acceptable for recipients. For example, when a speaker used direct request strategy to ask the hearer to do something, he or she may take advantage of mitigating supportive moves at the same time to reduce the level of impoliteness and mitigate the illocutionary force brought about by the direct strategy. In short, Chinese speakers made full use of mitigation devices to modulate the face-threatening impact when making requests in different contexts with different people.

The third research question focused on the differences in external modifications. It is common for both genders to present a potential grounder before or after a request. In addition, 'address term' which marked relative social status, played an important role in mitigating the imposition on requestees. When making requests to interlocutors of higher social status, both genders presented a notable preference for 'job title' to show respect. 'Kinship term' was observably employed by both genders at all status levels in order to shorten the social distance of the interlocutors, communicate efficiently, and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. In a word, the use of address terms is oriented towards softening the tone and maintaining the relationship. Even though sometimes direct strategy was adopted to ensure the effectiveness and efficacy of requests, speakers of both genders took advantage of 'address term' to mitigate the imposition. Both females and males used fewer aggravating devices than mitigating devices. It is worth noting that the male requesters employed more aggravating supportive moves in total than their female counterparts. Especially when speaking to someone of higher status, males still use this request move 8 times, whereas females did not use it at all. It seems that the male speakers focused more on the conciseness and efficiency of the realization of requests, and thus displayed less deferential behaviours. In contrast, the female speakers emphasize the maintenance of relationships, even at the expense of efficiency. Combining internal modifiers and external modifiers, it can be noted that males produced more modifiers per request at all status levels. It makes sense that more direct request strategies plus more external/internal modifiers may be the most favourable way of making requests for the male group, and more indirect request strategies plus fewer modifiers for the female group. The possible reason why males produced more modifiers is that they preferred using direct request strategies to make requests. More modifiers need to be adopted to reduce the abruptness and achieve politeness. It seems that Chinese speakers relied on a variety of modifiers to modulate the level of politeness, which was concordant with the previous studies [1].

To summarize, the results of the present study indicated that males overwhelmingly preferred making bald-on-record requests, but they showed a relatively more modest attitude towards requestees of higher status. On the contrary, females were more linguistically polite than males. The female speakers used more indirect strategies to display politeness, regardless of the recipient's social status.

Chinese culture is classified as a high-context culture [29] and Chinese speakers place a high value on solidarity and group harmony in interpersonal communications [30]. It is essential to show politeness and closeness when making requests so as to enhance solidarity as well as the hearer's likelihood of accepting the request. Meanwhile, Chinese culture is also traditionally hierarchical in nature [31]. Confucianism is deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. Displaying politeness could be traced back to the traditional concept of *Wenrouxianshu* (when it comes to addressing issues and communicating with others, females ought to be humble and patient). Females are socially expected to show politeness and deference in interpersonal communications. Hence, they are typically characterized as sensitive when interacting with others. Even in today's society, a woman's role remains as the guardian of traditional values. Gender bias exists all the same and the society's tolerance for women is still lower than for men, with women being expected to behave better than men. The level of politeness indicates who is in a more or less superior position in the conversation. Males occupy a central and powerful position in society, and so their communications were featured by ambitiousness, rationality, emotion control and domination [32]. However, females take a relatively marginal and powerless position in society. Their subordinate status determines that they have to demonstrate a higher level of politeness as well as be contextually sensitive and stylistically flexible [33] to defeat powerlessness and engage in better socialization. By using more polite linguistic structures and patterns, females satisfy their growing need to be valued and respected by society. They emphasize in-group relations to foster relationships and strive for

politeness and relative equality for themselves. Gradually, females become more polite and less direct in communication. That is why in the present study females speak more carefully and politely and avoid offending others when making the intrinsically face-threatening act: request.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of gender and social status on requests in the Chinese reality show *Back to Field* from three dimensions, i.e. request strategy, internal and external modification. When interacting with inferior and equal interlocutors, both groups preferred direct strategy. When interacting with superior interlocutors, males still preferred direct strategy, but females shifted their favourite strategy to conventionally indirect request strategy. Overall, males attached great importance to the efficiency of the conversation and therefore favoured direct and bald-on-record requests. However, females paid more attention to interpersonal relationships. They revealed a strong preference for indirectness and were more linguistically polite than their counterparts. A large range of modifiers was used by both genders to modify the imposition. On average, males produced more modifiers than their female counterparts and even aggravated the request force more frequently than females when making requests to recipients of higher social status. The present research provides new insights into pragmatics request strategy and politeness research.

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