

***Rènao* – What does it mean to have a good time the Chinese way?**

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Unlike the Chinese notions of (roughly) ‘face’ or ‘shame’ which attracted considerable attention and research of many scholars in cross-cultural studies, the language-specific elaboration of a hypothesized universal ‘conceptual theme’ of ‘I feel something good’ (cf. Wierzbicka 1999:50) seems to have received relatively less attention in the context of Chinese language and culture studies. To address this imbalance, this study is focused on an important Mandarin Chinese word *rènao* (roughly, ‘lively’, literal morphemic gloss: ‘hot:noisy’) – the word often described as relevant to the culture-specific notion of ‘having good time’, consumer behaviour, positive and sought out social atmosphere in the Chinese context (Link *et al.* 1989). While Laing (1989:160) characterized *rènao* as ‘the atmosphere of cheerful noisiness, regarded as a positive indication of the socially well ordered, happy Confucian family’, the word itself and the cultural practices associated with it have also drawn the attention of many participants of Chinese-Western cross-cultural encounters (cf. e.g. Salzmänn 1990:123)

Adopting an ethnopragmatic perspective elaborated in Goddard (2006 ed.), this paper discusses linguistic and symbolic evidence pertinent to the postulated cultural script encapsulating the key affective and behavioural aspects of this Chinese concept.