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Culture And Communication: A Study Focused On Chinese Characteristics

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**CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION:
A STUDY FOCUSED ON CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS
BY
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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication
Seton Hall University**

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is continually affecting our world in countless ways. The national boundaries are constantly changing, and societies are moving toward greater interdependence and interconnectedness. The propensity for this increasing globalization poses unique challenges to the issue of how people from diverse cultural backgrounds attempt to effectively communicate on a daily basis. With the globalization of business, individuals have lots of chance to interact with foreigners, as well as work with them. The need for effective communication in conjunction with cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding is thus intensified.

Global communication is a frequent topic of research and interest. A large body of literature exists on business communication in an international and cross-cultural context. Awareness of the existence of universals in communication is developing.

According to Goby (1999), the increasing diversity of language backgrounds, ethnicity, classes, and other variables in people working together has major implications for teaching business communication in colleges, universities, and within business organizations. This ever-shrinking "global village" (Sriramesh & Kim & Takasaki, 1999) requires that increasing numbers of communication professionals manage vital relationships with publics of different nationalities and cultures.

Mead (1990) suggested that the communication problems that arise from cultural difference could be overcome; differences can be turned to advantage. In order to obtain the advantages that emerge from the process of cross-cultural communication, individuals have to study the clashes between merging organizational cultures, and

cultural issues in the globalization process of the market place.

Gudykunst's (1988) study reveals that individuals know how to get to know others when they come from the same culture, but are not sure how to do this when people come from different cultures (p. 134). As the opportunities to meet with people from different cultural backgrounds are increasing, everyone needs to know enhance the knowledge in this field so as to be composed at the cross-cultural encounters.

Research Questions

What are the correlations between culture and communication? In what ways does the culture affect the communication pattern and style? What kind of knowledge and comprehension does one need to eliminate the conflicts and uncomfortableness when communicating with people from different cultural groups?

This study explores the relationship between these two fundamental elements in our life. And it explores the distinctive communication styles that Chinese and Americans have because of their respective cultures.

The Purpose of the Study

This study will explore the need for having at least basic knowledge of cultural differences, in order to face the trend of communication without cultural boundaries. Through a review of literature, this study examines the various aspects of cross-cultural communication, especially those related to Chinese, as well as North American culture. Cultural backgrounds and the historical heritage that may cause the differences will also be discussed in the paper.

Chinese is chosen to be the subject of this study because of the following reasons. First, Asian countries have become a focal point of joint venture objects and market expansion. Among the Asian, the Chinese represent one of the largest cultural

groups in the world. With 1.3 billion people, China is regarded as a mega market of the near future. Bond (1991) suggests, "historically, philosophically, politically, numerically, economically, geographically, occupationally, the Chinese are a significant cultural group" (p.108). For the past four millennia, China has had not only what is arguably the world's most successful continuous culture, but has also experienced some of the most radical social experiments ever imposed on a large population in recent decades (Szalay, Strohl, Fu, & Lao, 1994). Second, more than half of the Asian countries share cultural roots with China because of its profound historical background (Hui & Graen, 1997). Learning Chinese culture will definitely be of help when doing business with other Asian countries. Third, Chinese is one of the prominent immigrant subcultures in the United States. One can hardly avoid the possibilities of communicating with them. There has been, however, little theorizing or research in communication that is focus on Chinese culture (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). As a result, it is advisable to explore and to place importance in this area of study.

Overall, the purpose of this study is to integrate the scattered studies on this topic in such a way that it may be of benefit to those individuals who have chances to communicate with people of these backgrounds.

Need for the Study

As technology has changed the borders for business across the world, representatives from companies find themselves communicating in many different kinds of cultures. The increasingly multinational nature of modern business has posing the business people in more acute ways. Working with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds is an inevitable issue every businessperson is going to face (Smith & Wang, & Leung, 1997). And the need to understand the nuances of

communication in different settings is crucial to business success. Consequently, the field of communication has been given an increasing amount of attention, and the conception of this study is strongly needed as well as possible.

Triandis (1995) argued, "cross-cultural misunderstandings are very common" (p.145). By studying the communication process in different cultures, one can come to recognize and understand a vast unexplored region of human behavior that exists outside the range of people's conscious awareness (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Objectives

Variations in cultural assumptions, perceptions, and expectations often are grounds for intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. Questions such as what constitutes a polite interaction may provoke very different answers from people of different cultures. Consequently, both formal and informal exchanges in conversations among culturally different people can indeed be problematic (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

The goal of this study is to respond to the intellectual and pragmatic bewilderment by reviewing previous studies of cross-cultural communication with focus on Chinese Culture and on American-Chinese-Taiwanese encounters.

In order to achieve effective communication among groups of people from different cultures, it is essential to comprehend the characteristics of communication that are affected by culture. "The more we capitalize on components that are salient for that particular group, the greater is the chance of producing communications which are relevant to members of that group" (Szalay, Strohl, Fu, & Lao, 1994, p. 8).

The objective of this study is to improve the understanding of people who come from different identities, and furthermore, to eliminate the conflict and miscommunication that can develop from a lack of cross-cultural communication

intelligence. The author hopes to organize the studies in such a way as to help Americans understand Chinese and to help Chinese understand Americans in the various cultural dimensions relevant to the manner of their intercourse with each others, and in addition, to provide valuable information to guide further research.

Definitions of Terms

1. Cross-cultural communication: Any interaction involving two or more speakers who are different from one another based on ethnicity, race, religion, or sexual orientation.
2. Stereotype: An overgeneralization applied to an individual without regard to his or her own uniqueness. For example, "Men are unemotional, women are weak, Asians are quiet." Stereotypes are difficult to deal with because they sometimes contain kernels of truth. They are often conceptualizations that people use to avoid dealing with one another as individuals.
3. Chinese: Chinese in this paper refers to not only Chinese in mainland China and Taiwan, but also those in Australia, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States. However, the stress will be put on mainlanders and Taiwanese as most of the studies are done in these two lands.
4. Taiwanese: Taiwanese refers to the Chinese dwell in Taiwan.
5. Hanxu: A distinctive characteristic of Chinese communication. "It refers to a mode of communication that is contained, reserved, implicit, and indirect" (Gao & Tine-Toomey, 1998, p. 37).
6. Tinghua: A distinctive characteristic of Chinese communication. It refers "listening-centeredness" in interpersonal interactions (Gao & Tine-Toomey, 1998, p. 41).
7. Keqi: A basic principle that Chinese observe in their everyday speaking

practices. It delineates that communication between the self and others should be constructed in a thoughtful, mannerly, pleasant, and civil fashion. In short, being polite (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

8. Guanxi (Kuan-hsi): Guanxi is translated into English as "relationship" or "connections," but it also has the meaning of "intercourse." It is a network of personally defined reciprocal bonds or a form of interpersonal relationship that is predominantly based on particularistic criteria or ties (Tsui & Farh, 1997, p. 59).

9. Culturally different group: Any group whose life-styles, values, customs, traditions, language, and/or cultural practices are different from your own.

10. Multicultural Setting: Any place, agency, or institution where cultural different group members make up a portion of population.

Limitations

The present paper is a review-based and empirical one. An overview of the past two to three decades of cross-cultural communication research is presented. As a result, the paper is theoretical. The readers can gain a general knowledge on the research about cross-cultural communication in terms of the theories and the dimensions used in the comparison. However, the experimental evidences are limited, and need to be ameliorated in the future works. The interviews in this study are limited to subjects in Taiwan and the United States. It is suggested that a larger number of interviews or a survey should be conducted. As the subjects in this paper are Americans and the Chinese, the survey could be extended to the Chinese from Mainland China, Hong Kong, as well as any other geographical settings where the Chinese dwell.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Culture and Communication

There are numerous definitions of culture. To date, not one of them has reached out to be a consensus for all scholars. Weaver (2000) claims that culture is simply the way of life of a group of people passed down from one generation to the next through learning. Drake (1995) asserted that, culture is the culmination of “knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, ...concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (p.73). Among hundreds of definitions, Mead’s (1990) suggestion is a comprehensive one for this paper.

Culture is a set of values, which are shared by a group, ...culture values shared by one group may be rejected by another. The values are learned by members of the group, and hence taught by other members. A culture is passed down from one generation to the next. It is acquired, and it is not innate. (p.14)

When individuals are socialized, they learn various patterns of interaction that are based on the norms, rules, and values of their culture. These patterns of interaction forms the basis for individual communication styles.

A similar point of view is that of Gudykunst (1997): Culture can be seen as including everything that is human made, or as a system of shared meanings. When individuals are socialized, they learned various patterns of interaction that are based

on different aspects -- norms, rules, values, beliefs, attitudes, roles, and behaviors -- of their culture (Triandis, 1995).

Parents and teachers pass down their beliefs to the children; the rules and norms needed for successful interaction in their society, where right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal are clearly defined. This taught-and-learned pattern in a society shows that education is means to pass down culture from one generation to the next. With similar educational backgrounds, people who come from the same culture regard those of other cultures as strange or eccentric because their habits and beliefs are new to them. However, even with the same cultural background, people may differ from one to another, because "no one individual knows all aspects of the culture and each person has a unique view of the culture" (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 329).

Culture is informally or tacitly acquired before ones' adolescence. People usually take their own culture for granted until surrounded by those who are different, who are from another culture. That is the time when one becomes more consciously aware of his/her own culture, and when the possible conflict and misunderstanding occur (Weaver, 2000).

According to Triandis (1995), "a culture is usually linked to a language, a particular time period, and a place" (p. 4). It not only conditions the perceptions of reality but also programs our language patterns. What, where, and how we should talk is regulated by culture (Chen, 1995, p. 85). "But language on its own is insufficient to create a common culture, historical period and geographic location are also needed to define a culture" (Triandis, 1995, p.4). In America, for example, although almost everyone speaks English-- which is regarded as a common language within this nation-- people from the east coast have different patterns of communication from people than the west coast. Clearly, regional boundaries effects

communication to a certain extent.

Culture is formed through interaction and communication and the culture regulates the interaction among people. Chen (1995) claims that culture is manifested in people's communication patterns (p. 85). Individuals and groups communicate in order to express themselves and furthermore, to reach common understanding. By communicating, members get to know each other, exchange experiences, recognize common interests, agree on immediate aims, and so on so forth.

Chen (1995) claims that culture and communication are indeed part of each other. Chen (1995) suggests, "Culture specific approach for the study of intercultural communication is increasingly important" (p.90). He notes that intercultural communication scholars pay much attention to communication process while ignoring the concept of culture itself. Hall and Hall (1990) even concluded, "culture is communication and communication is culture" (p.3).

Cultural Dimensions of Cultural Variability

Cultural communications often are examined in terms of dimensions of cultural variability, used to explain similarities or differences in communication behavior across cultures. (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996, Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Ting-Toomey, et al., 1991) It is advised to use several dimensions to examine cultures since "similarities and differences in communication across cultures cannot be fully understood using only one dimension of cultural variability" (Gudykunst, 1997, p.335). Each dimension influences specific types of communication behavior, but combinations of dimensions are often necessary to explain certain types of communication (p.335).

Given its communication base and extensive use, Gudykunst's (1997)

introduction of cultural variability was selected as the framework to be used in this paper in explaining the similarity and differences cross the cultures being discussed. Other cultural variability noted in the literature on cross-cultural communication will also be included in this paper (e.g., Hofstede's [1980] four dimensions; Hall's, [1989] high-low context communication; Triandis's [1995] face negotiation theory), nonetheless, with the emphasis on those of significance to Americans, Chinese, and Taiwanese.

Individualism-collectivism

The major theoretical dimension isolated by theorists across many disciplines is individualism-collectivism. Multitudinous studies in the field of cross-cultural communication have supported individualism-collectivism as the most important dimension of cultural variability in social behavior as well as communication styles (Barnes, 1998; Gudykunst, 1997; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996; Ng, Loong, He, Liu, & Weatherall, 2000; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). The cooperative and competitive situations can be conceived as collectivists and the individualistic as individualist. In collectivist societies, people are trained to cooperate with members of a few in-groups and to compete with everyone else (Triandis, 1988).

Triandis (1995) defined individualism as follows:

A social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of theirs; and emphasize rational analyses of

the advantages and disadvantages to association with others. (p. 2)

Collectivism, on the other hand, is defined as:

A social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and the duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives. (p.2)

Individualistic cultures (such as the United States, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada) emphasize individual goals over group goals, individual concerns over group concerns. Whereas collectivistic cultures (such as China, Taiwan, Pakistan, Japan, and Korea) stress group goals over individual goals, group concerns over individual concerns (Barnes, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al. 1991). With the traits it illustrates, individualism-collectivism is "often used to understand the difference in communication styles between Americans and Chinese" (Chen, 1995, p. 85).

Individuals value privacy. Collectivists do not value it much and often find being alone frightening. Collectivists do not respect the personal space of others, as do individualists (Triandis, 1995, p.159). Collectivists are more likely to emphasize the values of cooperation, equality, and honesty. Individualism, on the other hand, has been found to correlate with high levels of achievement and perceived loneliness. (Triandis, 1988, 1995) Gudydunst (1997) suggests that individualism-collectivism exists in all culture but one tends to predominate. The American society consciously encourages individual differences, whereas the Chinese society rarely awards such

differences, moreover, the uniqueness is being discouraged.

Uncertainty Avoidance

“Uncertainty avoidance involves the lack of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty and ambiguity” (Gudykunst, 1988, p.140). Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance have high levels of anxiety, a great need for formal rules, and a low tolerance for groups that believe in a deviant manner.

In comparison to members of cultures low in uncertainty avoidance (UA), members of cultures high in UA have a relatively low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, which expresses itself in higher levels of anxiety and energy release, greater need for formal rules and absolute truth, and less tolerance for people or groups with deviant ideas or behavior (Gudykunst, 1997).

“This theory is useful in explaining communication between people from different cultures and interethnic communication in the United States” (Gudykunst 1988, p. 124). Individuals know how to get to know others when they come from the same culture, but are not sure how to do this when people come from different cultures. Gudykunst (1988) further asserts that, uncertainty reduction theory is one of the major theories used to explain interpersonal communication in the United States.

Gudykunst (1998) suggested eight variables that were related to reducing uncertainty: knowledge of host culture, shared networks, stereotypes, inter-group attitudes, favorable contact, cultural identity, second language competence, and cultural similarity (p. 124). Gundykunst (1998) claimed that there is a strong desire for consensus in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. According to his study, members of cultures high in uncertainty avoidance have a lower tolerance for ambiguity. To the contrary, members of cultures low in uncertainty avoidance

cultures have lower stress levels, weaker superegos, and they are more willing to take risks than people in high uncertainty avoidance culture (p.59).

Chinese are reluctant to talk with strangers and will rarely initiate a conversation with someone they do not know. Americans, by contrast, place a high value on conversation as a vehicle for establishing relationships and hence often find the Chinese offish (Bond, 1991, p.52). Chinese tend to make a critical distinction between established acquaintances and others.

Bond (1991) mentioned in his study that there is little need in Chinese society to develop the social skills to meet and talk alone to strangers. Chinese make new acquaintances through an intermediary, who is usually “known to both parties”, and is “part of both social circles, effectively bringing the two strangers into contact” (p.52). They will channel much conversation through this intermediary. This is in line with Chen’s (1995) point: “The Chinese show much higher preference of bargaining and *mediation* than American participants in conflict situations” (p. 86). This strategy rarely happens among the Americans, who take the intermediary as intruding too much into others’ affairs.

Power Distance

Power distance (PD) is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, p. 419). One form of power is the ability to control the behavior of others (Cushner & Bruslin, 1996, p. 314). Individuals from high power distance cultures accept authority and inequality as an inherent part of society. On the other hand, individuals from low power distance cultures like to minimize the differences between their roles and status. Role relationship is an inevitable segment in all cultures. “Power distance is useful in understanding stranger’s behavior in role

relationship" (Gudykunst, 1995, p.333). This dimension can be applied to the relationship between superiors and subordinates in organizations, teachers and students in educational institutes, and those "involving different degrees of power or authority" (p. 333). "High power distance cultures value an order of inequality with everyone having a rightful place where the hierarchy reflects existential inequality" (Gudykunst, 1988, p. 61). In this dimension, the relationship between people of different statuses is clearly defined.

The Chinese place heavy emphasis on the status of each member of the team. Chinese respect hierarchy, authority, and adhere to large power distance (Paik & Tung, 1999). Bond (1991) claims that Chinese in leadership positions enjoy a great range of authority. It embodies in real-life interaction with superiors. Subordinates are less likely to volunteer opinions, take individual initiative, or depart from standard operating procedures without a superior's approval. The result is that many decisions are made in private by superiors without passing through any open discussion or voting procedure (p. 85).

High and Low Context Communication

While individualism-collectivism defined broad differences between cultures, the low- and high-context scheme focuses upon cultural differences in communication processes (Hall & Hall, 1990; Gudykunst, 1998). Gudykunst (1998) pointed out that, "understanding differences in low- and high-context communication can help improve the quality of our communication with strangers" (p.57).

Hall (1989) suggests that "a high-context message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (p.79). A low-context message, on the contrary, is one in which "the mass of information is vested in the

explicit code”(p.79).

Although no culture exists at either end of the low- high-context scale, the culture of the United States, the subject of this report, is toward the low end. Most Asian cultures, including Chinese, fall toward the high-context end of the continuum (Gudykunst, 1995; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). “The emphasis on nonverbal aspects of communication is shared by many high-context cultures” (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986, p.528). Hall (1976) and Hsu (1981) deduced similar annotations about communication in the Chinese culture. The characteristics that the members of high-context culture display in line with Bond’s (1991) conclusion: “Although the scientific data are sparse, most psychologists would characterize Chinese culture along with the Japanese as high context” (p.49).

In low-context cultures verbal or written messages require less knowledge of the context in order to be correctly interpreted. Members of low-context cultures, hence, can gather information about others’ attitudes, values, emotions, and past behavior and use it to predict their future behavior (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986, p.529). Members of high-context cultures, in contrast, seek out social information (e.g., where others went to school, their company).

It appears there are social behaviors or types of information that are more important sources of ambiguity in high-context cultures than in low-context cultures, including the following: (a) knowing others’ social background, (b) knowing whether others will behave in a socially appropriate manner, (c) knowing that others understand individuals’ feelings, (d) knowing what others mean when they communicate, and (e) knowing whether others will make allowances for individuals when they communicate (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986).

In high-context cultures verbal skills are considered suspect and confidence is

placed in nonverbal aspects of communication (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986). A comprehensive study by Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) in the Chinese communication styles proffered some examples corresponding to this dimension. This will be discussed in details in Chapter IV: The Characteristics of Chinese Communication.

Face Negotiation Theory

S. Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) define "face" as the projected and the claimed sense of self-image and self-respect in a relational situation. Facework is conceptualized as the set of interaction strategies to mitigate face-threatening and/or face-honoring situations between two or more parties.

There are two dimensions of face maintenance strategy: self-face concern, and the other-face concern. Culture influences both face maintenance dimensions with a higher degree of other-face concern predominates in collectivistic cultures, such as China and Taiwan. And both the Chinese and the Taiwanese people use higher degree of obliging and avoiding styles in conflict management than the US ones (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). It is suggested that "collectivists using a predominately higher degree of other-face maintenance strategies than individualists" (p.289). "US people use higher degree of dominating conflict style than the collectivists, and the collectivists use a higher degree of obligating and avoiding styles than the US group" (p. 289).

Chapter III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The review of literature in this study has provided current and future research with an abundance of good global business communication skills between Americans and Chinese/Taiwanese. Most of the studies present bits and pieces of information on cultures and the characteristics of them. Few of them provide readers with a framework for integrating their own observations and experiences (Hall & Hall, 1990). While scholars are putting emphasis on multicultural sensitivity or global communication strategies, they need to get more real practice in the international arena; not only an article or a videotape clip on international business, but also an honest to goodness contact. Hence this report is constructed to systematize some landmark studies in the cross-cultural communication field, specifically in American-Chinese ones. Furthermore, in order to draw a parallel comparison and substantiate the finding from the review of the literature, interviews are conducted and integrated to the existing literature.

The author took the approach of reviewing theories and the related research, as well as analyzing practical experiences and observations from interviews. Since the participants are from culturally different groups, their similarities and differences can be compared. The subjects are Americans who work in organizations located in Taiwan, and Taiwanese/Chinese who work in the organizations, or go to schools in the United States. The interviews are conducted as one-on-one meetings in Taiwan. As for the interviewees in America, the participants answer the questions disseminated by the author via emails.

Background

Bond (1991) notes that the many researchers making cross-cultural comparisons that involved American and Chinese samples considered subject "Chinese" whether they come from China, Singapore, Taiwan, Chinatown in San Francisco, or New York, as a whole. They have tended to ignore the possible differences among these Chinese samples because "Chinese in different countries are similar" (Bond, 1991, p.4).

In this paper, the term Chinese refers to not only Chinese in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, but also those in the United States, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, as well as in many other geographical regions throughout the world. However, due to the peculiar relationship between the People's Republic of China (henceforth mainland China) and the Republic of China (henceforth Taiwan), and the author's background and interest, there is a need to expound the similarity as well as the dissimilarity to understand the effect that geographical boundary brings to communication. Hence, Chinese and Taiwanese culture will also duly be discussed distinctively at times.

Generally speaking, Chinese scholars and psychologists are in a more advantageous position to work with Chinese subjects due to their acquaintance with the language, the cultural background, the social structure, as well as having practical convenience in carrying out the research programs (Hwang, 1982, p.227). With the reflections on 23 years of immersing oneself in the Chinese culture, and the 2-years experience of pursuing Master's degree in North America, the author has been fascinated by the two kinds of cultures and is determined to make every effort to providing the knowledge and wisdom for future researchers who are interested in this topic.

Approaches to the Study of Cultural Communication

Gudykunst (1997) suggested that there are two basic approaches to the study of culture and communication: emic and etic. The emic approach focuses on understanding communication from within specific cultures. The etic approach, in contrast, focuses on studying communication from a position outside the cultures and comparing them by using several premeditated criteria. Berry (1980) gave these two terms a summary of the distinction (see Table 1):

Table 1

The Differences of the Two Approaches to the Study of Cultural Communication

Emic Approach	Etic Approach
Studies behavior from within the system	Studies behavior from a position outside the system
Structure discovered by the analyst	Structure created by the analyst
Criteria are relative to internal characteristics	Criteria are considered absolute or universal

In short, etic refers to research that stresses universals; while emic refers to research that focuses on culturally unique phenomena and interpretations.

Communication research can be either emic or etic. Although the emic and etic approaches are viewed as two contrasting concepts, they can be and should be integrated whenever possible (Gudykunst, 1997).

“Specific cultures are of theoretical interest only when they are used to operationalize dimensions of cultural variability” (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986, p.149).

“Using dimensions of cultural variability as etic concepts allows broad similarities

and differences in communication to be predicted across cultures” (Gudykunst, 1997, p.335). Before getting the cultural research field, it is necessary to have some knowledge about cultural variability (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Hence, hereafter the major dimensions of cultural variability will be discussed.

Research Methods

There are many ways to collect data on a given theme. Researchers studying cultural differences in the basic cultural variability of individualism versus collectivism, for instance, have used various tools to explore the differences: daily records of daily activities, observations on non-verbal responses, and measures of values. In reviewing studies using these different methods, it was found that the conclusions are similar.

“To generate the theories proffered to date, cultural variability must be linked to communication” (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986, p.147). The author collected abundant theories of cultural variability and the reports on American and Chinese cultural characteristics in journal articles as well as dissertations, books.

By reviewing these studies, the author identifies several core theories in understanding the discrepancy between American and Chinese cultures. Historical background, which dominates the characteristics of both cultures, is also covered in this study.

The interviews are adopted as an aid to this review-based study. Therefore, the author chose two to three subjects who have the experience working or interacting with people from different culture with their inherent ones in each land. From the conflicts these participants have countered, the practical findings are provided to compare with the theoretical findings in the literature.

Chapter IV

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE COMMUNICATION

Background

Chinese culture, along with other cultures, has its specific rules and norms of everyday social interactions (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). To understand ways of relating in the Chinese culture, one needs to inquire into the interconnected nature of personal relationships and to uncover some of the guiding principles embedded in those relationships (Gao, 1996). Soong (1992) indicated that, there is a background culture that binds people together among Chinese, a culture deeply rooted in Confucianism. Confucianism has had a profound impact on interpersonal relationships and the communication processes in Chinese culture (Barnes, 1998; Bond, 1993; Gao, 1996; Hwang, 1982; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1990). As Fuller and Peterson (1992) suggested, "one cannot begin to discuss Chinese culture without mention of Confucianism"(p.186), a powerful force that spread out from the borders of the Chinese empire into most Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and beyond. Under the heritage of Confucianism, an emphasis is placed on collectivity, filial piety, non-assertiveness, and interpersonal harmony.

In this chapter, a Chinese perspective on interpersonal relationships and communication style is presented in the following sections, which are examined to be the most important concepts in operating the Chinese daily life. The author will extract those from the review of the past studies and provide discussions of the way they affect the Chinese communication.

China and Taiwan

According to the report from United Nations (2001), the population of the world

has exceeded six billion in 2000, Chinese account for almost 1.5 billion of the population (including the population of Taiwan, which totals 23 million people). To illustrate the relationship between China and Taiwan, a brief historical background is provided. Taiwan geographically is an isolated island apart from Mainland China. After losing a civil war to the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the Nationalist Party moved to Taiwan, and established a government on this island. Since 1949, Taiwan has been an "autonomous region" (Chu, 1999, p.208), self-governed, but has not officially declared independence, because mainland China constantly threatened military invasion (Chang, 1997). Taiwan's ambiguous political status has given its economic successes a distinctive flavor. As for the population in Taiwan, slightly less than 85 percent of persons were born in Taiwan as the descendants of earlier Chinese immigrants from the mainland China provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. Another 14 percent are people who were born on mainland China and moved to Taiwan after World War II. Also ethnically Chinese, they hail from many different provinces of China. Finally, there are aborigines, the original inhabitants of the island before the Chinese came, who constitute about 1 percent of the population. Aside from the aborigines, the population of Taiwan is Chinese. The main difference between these two lands can be seen in the arenas of politics, economics, and technology (Chang & Holt, 1996; Fuller & Peterson, 1992). Mainland China executes communism, whereas Taiwan implements democracy. Yet, Taiwan, with its unique historical background as well as its ongoing struggle to be a legitimate Chinese country, embraces and promotes Chinese culture. Although the people live on this island considered themselves as Chinese from a historical point of view, they distinguish themselves with the mainlanders by identifying themselves as "Taiwanese."

In fact, the vast majority of Chinese, both on China and Taiwan, still share major elements of Chinese culture. Confucianism is an example with profound impact in both lands (Barnes, 1998; Bond, 1991; Bond, 1993; Chang, 1997; Chen, 1995; Fuller & Peterson, 1992; Gao, 1996; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hsu, 1981; Hwang, 1982; Ng, 1998; Ting-Toomey, et al., 1991; Tong, 2000; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991).

Taiwan and China have made difference use of Confucius over the last several decades, but on the whole the Chinese are rooted far more firmly in reality than they are in speculation about, or reverence for, the supernatural (Fuller & Peterson, 1992, p. 187). Some of the most important aspects of Chinese cultural life concern the ways in which interpersonal relationships are conceived and regulated (Chang & Holt, 1996, p. 1429). Confucianism dominates the Chinese way of living and communication because it is in deep agreement with the ways the Chinese have followed from time immemorial. As the prototype of Chinese social organizations, family has significance for the study of family relationships in particular and interpersonal relationships in general (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). In Taiwan, Confucianism turns into business practice with running family-owned enterprise as destination. Most large-scale domestic enterprises in Taiwan are family-owned. In China, due to the bridle the government put on the economic system, state-run business still account for the majority. But with the reforms of the 1980s, a plethora of *getihu*, the socialist version of a family-owned business, lends evidence to the preference for family relationships in conducting business (Fuller & Peterson, 1992, p. 187). In essence, this historical heritage of Confucianism shapes Chinese ways of communication.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a code of ethics and standard of conduct, developed to guide the relationships among people (Chang, 1997). It is a collectively oriented philosophy that presents a hierarchical view of social order. The central tenets of Confucianism are based on the moral nature of man, harmony of society, political legitimacy, order and unity, and hierarchy (Fuller & Peterson, 1992, p.186). Confucius believes that each person has his or her responsibilities according to his or her social position in the social order. In essence, "the pursuit of collective interest, rather than individual interest, is the mark of the true Confucian" (Fuller & Peterson, 1992, p. 186). It is clear that Confucianism is the dominant principle underlying the Chinese society. The characteristics: definitive views on obedience, strict discipline, respect for elders and upper authority, reverence for tradition, maintenance of harmony, and negation of conflict are attributed to the influence of Confucianism (Ng, 1998; Tong, 2000). Bond (1991) also suggests that the Confucian tradition of hierarchy results in decision-making. Leaders are "conferred considerable discretionary authority" (p. 85); they are not required to justify their decision openly. "The American apparatus of power sharing – explanation, debate, documentation, voting – is public through and through, not so the Chinese" (p. 85). Another consequence of the Confucian hierarchy is that "few Chinese have any practice in making decisions and submitting them to public scrutiny" (p. 85). Mann's research using Taiwanese respondents as subjects was cited in Bond's (1991) work. Taiwanese respondents tried to avoid making individual choices. They would rather panic under the pressure of time, procrastinate, and rationalize away problems, as compared to their American counterparts. This pattern results from early social training that emphasized since his or her early deferring to superiors or to a group when confronting new

circumstances alone.

According to Confucian views, the stability of a society is based on “unequal relationships” (Lewis, 1996, p.275) between people. The five cardinal relationships (*wu-lun*) are: emperor-subject, father-son, elder-younger brothers, husband-wife, friend-friend. To Chinese, a warm and close family remains the most important goal in life. Under the heavy influence of Confucianism, Chinese often view themselves interdependent with the surrounding social context, and it is the “self and OTHER” (Gao, 1996, p.83; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.7) concept that becomes the focal item to be presented. Presumably the term “OTHER” is capitalized to indicate the greater importance of the “other” in Chinese relational communication, though the reason is never been given in these two studies.

Self versus Other

In Chinese cultural context, the self is defined through an interacting web of social and personal relationships (Ting-Toomey, 1988). “Self in the Confucian sense is defined by a person’s surrounding relations, which often are derived from kinship networks and supported by cultural values such as filial piety, loyalty, dignity, and integrity” (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.83). Confucianism asserts that individuality and the true self do not belong together; rather, social and ethical responsibilities define the true self. This view of an interdependent self is in great contrast to the American view of an independent self. The contrasting result flow inevitably from the respective kinship premises of the two cultures. Although the biological family consists of parents and unmarried children, American interaction pattern emphasizes isolated dyads; while for the Chinese, no dyadic relationship is free from the larger network (Hsu, 1981, p. 87).

Applegate and Sypher (1988) suggest that the person-centered quality of

parenting communication is an important antecedent to social development in children (p.57). The Chinese children learn to see the world in terms of a network of relationships. They not only have to comply with their parents, but they also have little choice in the wider social relationships and what they, as individuals would like to do about themselves. On the contrary, "in America, the child learns to see the world strictly on an individual basis" (Hsu, 1981, p. 88). Self, to an American child, is personal and individualized. Gao (1996) suggests that the Chinese self involves multiple layers of relationships with others. "The other-orientation is key to an interdependent self, ...it is inseparable from the Chinese self" (p. 84). In essence, the notion of others makes up an indispensable part of the Chinese self and it consequently permeates major concepts of Chinese interpersonal relationships and communication (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.10).

Given that Chinese self is governed by the hierarchy and role relationships, the position one occupies and the role one plays define not only how one should perceive oneself in relation to others but also how one should engage in communication with others (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.17). To conclude, the Chinese understanding of self is relational, other-centered, and influenced by hierarchy and role.

As previously mentioned, Chinese beliefs in personal relationships, which influence communication style in everyday lives of Chinese. There are assorted characteristics of Chinese communication, the author will focus on four of the most weighted ones in the following sections: (a) *hanxu* or implicit communication, (b) *tinghua* or listening centeredness (receiver centeredness), and (c) *keqi* or politeness (humility).

Hanxu (Implicit Communication)

"The Chinese phrase *hanxu* refers to a mode of communication that is contained,

reserved, implicit, and indirect" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, p.37). To be *hanxu*, one should leave the "unspoken" to the listeners. "Chinese communication emphasizes the nonverbal more than the verbal aspects of communication" (p.39). Lewis (1996) notes that Chinese rarely say "no" directly, they only hint at difficulties. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1992, as cited in Chang, 1997), collective cultures such as China, Japan, and Korea emphasize the importance of group harmony and group conformity, which are accomplished through the use of imprecise, ambiguous, verbal communication behaviors (p.3). This characteristic is also consistent with Hall and Hall's (1990, p. 6) conceptualization of high-context communication.

"*Hanxu* dictates a style of communication that puts much emphasis on nonverbal behavior and an indirect mode of communication" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.40). Nonverbally communicating with people indicates that the meanings often reside in the unspoken messages such as a smile, a hand movement, a subtle change of expression in one's face, and even where a pause conveyed in a sentence. An indirect style of talking is apparent in Chinese discourse. When Chinese vaguely express an idea, an opinion, or a suggestion, they "expect their conversational partner to be highly involved and to take an active role in deciphering messages as well as in mutually creating meanings" (Gao & Ting-Tomme, 1998, p 38). Doubtlessly there are more rules surrounding the display of emotions in Chinese culture. The rules may become so ingrained during socialization that, as adults the Chinese react less strongly to provocative events. They appear more placid compare to the American counterparts. For example, a Chinese person is rarely seen jumping up and down upon receiving a piece of good news. When presented with a gift, Chinese are less likely to display the same level of joy and delight, as do Americans. By not showing joy, sorrow, or anger overtly, Chinese avoid burdening others with their feelings and

they maintain harmony (Bond, 1993; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). "The placidity is perfectly understandable against a cultural background which values respect for hierarchy, harmony in the family unit, and moderation in all things" (Bond, 1991, p. 41). Bond (1993) claims that, to a Chinese, extreme emotions often are viewed as sources of various health problem, and internal balance.

Hanxu also implies that communication in Chinese culture is inherently negotiable. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) claim that an indirect style of speech enables one to negotiate meanings with others in interpersonal relationships and to help maintain existing relationships without destroying group harmony (p.37). Emotions may not be expressed as openly as Americans would expect, the presence will certainly be felt (Fuller & Peterson, 1992). The practice of *hanxu* is compatible with the conceptualization of self in a relational context, which is aimed to "protect the relationship and allow the parties to the conversation maximum freedom of maneuver" (Bond, 1991, p.53). Accordingly, the harmony among individuals and within in-group is preserved.

Tinghua (Listening centeredness)

The Chinese word *ting* (聽) denotes "to listen," "to hear," and "to heed." The term *hua* (話) means "speeches," "talks," or "words." The phrase *tinghua* refers to the mode of communication that is listening centeredness. It is as well used to ask someone to be obedient, or to describe someone who is docile. Yum (1988, as cited in Chang, 1997) notes that one of the characteristics of East Asian is receiver centeredness. Given that being a good listener is a virtue, Chinese discourage the talkativeness in discourses. There are a numbers of Confucius' sayings like "The superior man seeks to be slow of speech but quick in action" and "A person with a glib tongue is rarely benevolent". And "eloquent persons are considered to be less

knowledgeable and even dangerous" (Chen, 195, p. 88). Chinese people reject debate and argumentation in the process of communication, but seek to cultivate their listening skills (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Traditionally, to Chinese, speech is considered not an effective way of communication. It is the "act", based on the sincerity of mind that accounts for the development of interpersonal relationship (Chen, 1995, p. 88). *Tinghua* is considered as the consequence led by the prominence of status and role relationships in Chinese culture (Bond, 1991; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

To Chinese, there are conditions associated with speaking. Only the opinions of those who are entitled to speak are recognized (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 42). In the Chinese family, children are taught to accept what their parents say. Obedient children are those who listen but do not voice or even have their own opinions. A Taiwanese idiom: "children have no mouths, but ears" is heard when parents lecture their children. When a child challenges a parent, or an elder verbally, it is considered disobedient behavior and disrupting the harmony in the family. Children would be scolded and even punished for this kind of behavior. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) provided a finding of the clear roles of communication at the dinner table in Taiwan: The eldest men in the family engage in most of the talking, whereas the children listen and support their elders by agreements or occasional comments (p. 42). This is also found in most work environment. Gao and Ting-Toomey contend (1998) "communication interaction means learning to listen and, most important, learning to listen with full attention" (p.43).

This characteristic is developed not only in the family, but also in the education institutions. According to Gao and Ting-Toomey, (1998) most Chinese schools emphasize listening skills, memorizing skills, writing skills, and reading skills but

seldom focus on speaking skills (p. 43). Chinese children are also taught and encouraged to observe adults' countenance and to examine their words through the process of listening in order to behave accordingly (p.38).

Given that "Chinese personal identities are connected closely with the social roles they play" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.41), the ability to be sensitive to one's position is thus very much emphasized, because "the position one occupies in the hierarchical structure often determines how much one speaks, if at all, and how one speaks" (p. 42). A similar practice is found in Bond's (1991) report. He argues that there are two styles of communication: Instrumental style and Affective style. An instrumental style of communication is "goal oriented, and aims to bring the individual into a verbal exchange" (p.54). People use words as tools to chisel an agreement from the intersection of everyone's goals for the interaction. Americans are fall in this category that they "perceive speech as a resource for control and self-extension" (p.54).

On the contrary, Chinese fall within the affective style of communication, which is "relationship oriented" (p.54). The participants are more concerned about the attitudes of the other parties than about the outcome of the conversation. As a result, people avoid confrontational, argumentative talk. The best way to achieve the harmony is sometimes to be reticent.

Silence is perceived to be one of the consequences of listening. Bond (1991) notes, "silence is an important element in the Chinese communication process, ...research indicates that Chinese are more comfortable and less threatened than Americans by such silences in a conversation" (p.53).

Keqi (Politeness)

“*Keqi* (politeness) is a basic principle that Chinese observe in their everyday speaking practices” (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 45). As previously mentioned the Chinese self needs to be defined, recognized, and completed by others, seeking harmony with others and preserving mannerly, peaceful relations with others is no surprise to be the primary concern for Chinese. Engaging in *keqi* interactions is thus necessary for Chinese to achieve their goals in relationships with others (p. 46).

Keqi shows in the exchange of polite talk with people. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) addressed an interesting example in the Chinese host-guest relationship (p. 46). A Chinese guest's first response to any offer, ranging from a glass of water to a dinner invitation, is often ritualized rejection, which is an expression of politeness. By this rejection, the guest shows the goodwill in reducing the inconvenience they bring as a guest. Yet, the host is expected to insist until the offer is accepted. The host demonstrates the “sincerity” of the offer through this “ritual of *keqi* (i.e., offer-decline-offer-decline-offer-accept)” (p.46), which is considered essential in host-guest context.

Keqi also embodies the values of modesty and humility in Chinese culture (Chen, 1995; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Self-effacing talk is a very common verbal behavior in Chinese society. Bond (1995) argues that Chinese has “a tendency to play down one's own skills or efforts publicly, to flatter the other effusively, and to speak about the group accomplishments rather than individual contributions”(p.53).

Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) cited Y. G. Gu's (1990) illustration of terms as following:

Terms such as *yu jian* (愚見; “stupid opinion”), *zhou zuo* (拙作; “clumsy work”),

han she (寒舍; “shabby house”), and *bi xiao* (敝校; “humble school”) are utilized to be self-directed, whereas *gao jian* (高見; “great opinion”), *da zuo* (大作; “big work”), *gui fu* (貴府; “precious mansion”), and *gui xiao* (貴校; noble school) are other-directed. (p.47)

Those expressions of words are rarely seen in American culture. Hall and Hall (1990) suggest that it is common to brag and to boast for Americans. “They tend to exaggerate, ...and they enjoy writers who tell ‘tall tales’” (p. 146). They take this as a display of confidence.

Another practice of *keqi* embodied in denying compliments. A Chinese would automatically answer “I am not that good,” or “not really” when someone gives him/her any compliment (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

“Modesty training not only is an integral part of child education in Chinese culture but also is adopted by overseas Chinese” (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 48). Chinese will say they cannot do something even when they are capable of doing it. Therefore, observance of *keqi* is a skill essential to any type of interpersonal interaction and communication in order to see the story behind the scene (p.48).

Guanxi versus. Relationship

Chinese culture stresses the importance of human interaction. The essence of this interaction is *Guanxi*, which is developed over a long time period and reaches down to every aspect of Chinese society, influencing social, political, and commercial relations (Sander & Carroll, 1991).

Relationship refers to the association between two things. This association can vary in magnitude and direction. *Guanxi* refers to the association between two things, and similar to relationship, it can vary in magnitude and direction. “A

common translation for *guanxi* is relationship” (Hui & Graen, 1997, p.453). Both relationship and Guanxi are fundamental to understanding human interactions leadership and management in both America and China (Hui & Graen, 1997, p. 453).

Guanxi (*Kuan-hsi*) is an extremely important construct in studying organizational outcomes in mainland China (Hart, 2000). It can be the determining factor in winning a business deal when the competitors are offering similar products and services at comparable prices. The one has better “*guanxi*” is the one who gets the deal.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Based on the literature and personal experience, the author assumed that the conflicts that occur during the cross-cultural communication process are mainly due to fundamental differences in cultures. The interviews that the author conducted support most of the findings. The intelligence and conclusions from the interviews are collected in this chapter.

Record of the Interviews

According to James Martin (personal communication, November 20, 2001), an American manager in a Taiwanese firm, Teco Electric & Machinery Co., LTD., during the startup of his overseas assignment, "conflicts occurred every day" between himself and the Taiwanese coworkers and subordinates because of the differences in communication styles. He often feels upset that his Taiwanese coworkers are reluctant to speak out their personal opinions at the meetings. At the regular meeting held every week, for instance, most of the Taiwanese coworkers only listen to what the chairperson says, they seldom response nor give any feedback during the meetings. On the contrary, the author encountered the opposite scenario during her study in the States. When American professors ask students whether they have questions, there was always at least one student who would raise his/her hand and asks questions. Americans are encouraged to ask questions and to express individual reflections while Chinese are encouraged to listen to the thoughts of people in higher positions. As noted in the previous chapter, the Chinese stress on the importance of *tinghua* (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 41). A good employee is one who listens to talk (*tinghua*),

does what he or she is told, and has the willingness to meet others' criticism. In most work situations, communication means learning to listen with full attention in Chinese culture.

Dietfried Kuhn (personal communication, November 21, 2001), the project leader of a working team, had worked in India for one year, and has been working in Taiwan for four years. Although he comes from Germany, his experience of working with culturally different people provides great illustration on the conflicts that happen among cultures. "The characteristics of Chinese culture are very different from that of the western cultures." He started to take overseas assignments from Deutsche Telecom some 20 years ago. "Although each country has its own culture which affects the way their people communicate, I found that the differences between western countries and Asian countries are very apparent." He said that in general Taiwanese are more indirect and more reluctant to express their thoughts. When he discusses issues with his Taiwanese subordinates, for example, they usually agree with everything he says. At first, he took what they said as what they meant. But then he realized that even when he said the opposite opinions the next time, he still got the pros. "I then realize things are not going to work this way for me, so I started to make them speak, little by little. And I list all the possible solutions for them to choose one from them get them used to making decisions." Kuhn said that he likes to work in multicultural environment because he has new exploration everyday, and that amazes him. "Of course I am more comfortable to work with the people with the same style as I do, I also enjoy the new findings everyday." "When you understand where those characteristics come from, you know how to communicate with them."

Martin's experience was not as positive at first. He said he was very upset at

the beginning. He does not understand “why do not them just let me know what I should do?” (personal communication, November 20, 2001) Taiwanese people like to beat around the bushes. And one of his colleagues, Amy Lin, told him that he has too many opinions. She told him it is more appropriate to show the respect to the boss by listening what the boss said. “Once you get used to it, you know how to deal with it.” (J. Martin, personal communication, November 20, 2001)

A common consent reached by all the American interviewees who worked with Taiwanese was that Taiwanese are too modest and unassuming to express their comment or opinions directly. “When you ask them for comment, request, ... almost all of them would say ‘yes’ instead of accept or reject. You can never know their real meaning of a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’.” (A. Kimball, personal communication, November 20, 2001)

The intelligence from the Chinese working with the Americans in the United States is quite opposite. A. Chu’s (personal communication, November 24, 2001) 3-year experience as a sales manager in an American company has enriched his knowledge about Americans in working environment. As per Chu, everything has to be talked about and analyzed in the United States, even the littlest thing has to be ‘why, why, why?’ He stated that he got headache from being bombarded with such persistent questions. The American is very explicit; he/her wants to a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, if someone tries to speak figuratively, the American is confused. Based on the conversation the author had with one of her American classmates, Americans do prefer directness in communication. In addition, they tend to exaggerate when they express their feelings. This finding is actually equivalent to the literature. Overall speaking, Americans tend to use more adjectives when they express themselves or describe a scenario.

Another problem the interviewees mentioned was the language barrier. As S. Cheng (personal communication, November 26, 2001), who has been working in the United States for one and half year said, "it is difficult to express myself well in English with nuance and persuasion, to burst into a conversation midstream as I do frequently in Taiwan with people who speak the same language as I do." People usually find it is uncomfortable to express their feelings in a language that is not their mother tongue. Most of them have to go through a translating process before the words burst out of their mouths. The American interviewees in Taiwan also found it is difficult to reach a fully understanding for the domestic Taiwanese coworkers as English is the second language. Furthermore, for Taiwanese people who had the experience working with colleagues from the U.S., who spoke only English, have found that discussion would be dominated by those for whom English was a first language (their American colleagues). The factor that contributes to this was that American workers are more outspoken in comparison with their Taiwanese counterparts, according to A. Chu (personal communication, November 24, 2001), the sales manager at Accelrys, Princeton, NJ. This corresponds with the author's finding in the literature. American culture is categorized toward low-context culture while Chinese culture is categorized toward the high-context end.

As Cheng (personal communication, November 26, 2001) stated, English speakers frequently dominated the conversation without realizing it, which adds hindrance for the English-as-second-language speakers to join the discourse. She believes that it is one of the greatest barriers to true communication. Cheng pointed out some circumstances she found in the American firm she works at would be of interesting value to the readers. In the organization she works at, for instance, she could be very straightforward to her boss when she is not clear with the demand.

She can call her boss's first name without adding any suffixes. She also found that everyone in her firm is motivated to ask questions. These behaviors are common in the United States, but are considered as disrespectful, stupid, impolite, and not *tinghua* (as defined in the previous chapter; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p.41) in the Chinese organizations. Calling the boss by his/her first name is considered very rude in Chinese culture. The subordinates always add "boss" in front of his/her boss's last name. There is also a special term for the boss's wife, if the boss is a male, to show the respect to the superior. The outcome of the interviews that the author had with these subjects support that the power distance is very strict and apparent in Chinese firms while it is not that distinct in the American firms.

Although it is hard to conclude which culture is good or bad, right or wrong, the possible scenarios of an American-Chinese interaction would be speculate as the following: The Chinese does not speak up for his/herself as he/she takes it for granted that the opponent would understand according to whatever the interaction they have had, and the American thinks there is no objection, everything is perfectly going well. As for the Americans, everyone should be his/her own advocate, no one would try to read your mind if you do not make any statement when there is a need. It is assumed that everyone would be his/her own advocate. On the contrary, there is no advocate in a Taiwanese firm. The rules are pretty much set and the employees follow the rules. Seldom would the employees have their own opinions, never mention to speak them up.

To sum up, Chinese people, in comparison with Americans, were found to be more introverted, more restrained, more withdrawn, more conservative, less impulsive, less social, less dominant, and less aggressive.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cross-cultural studies have made remarkable contributions in promoting intercultural and international understandings. But not all of the studies reported consistent results. "It seems that in cross-cultural studies, researchers tend to pay more attention to the difference between the cultural groups concerned" (Chen, 1995, p. 85). The study covered the most important dimensions of cultural variability for the readers who have interests in the field of cross-cultural communication research. The author agrees that "although the dimensions of cultural variability afford broad predictions of cultural similarities and differences, each dimension is manifested in a unique way within each culture" (Gudykunst, 1997, p. 335). As Gudykunst (1997) suggests, it is important to recognize that both poles of each dimension of cultural variability exists in all cultures. "Both individualistic and collectivistic, ...tendencies exist in all cultures, but one tendency tends to predominate in specific spheres of life (e.g., individualism predominates in the way U.S. Americans deal with strangers, but collectivism predominates in terms of volunteerism)" (p. 335).

Should we all realize that those who live in another part of the world are sharing with us many of our attitudes, beliefs, likes and dislikes, fears and worries, etc., we may accept them more readily instead of building up unfavorable stereotypes that would keep us away from one another. Since it is much more pleasant to accept one another when they have something in common, learning the similarities between different cultures may have positive results as it may draw the different peoples closer to one another.

Future Study

With this study, the author attempts to discover the impact that culture brings to communication, and the similarities as well as the differences that people from different cultures carry, which influences the process of translating the message. She also endeavors to organize the characteristics of the Chinese communication style that are found in the literature and from the personal experience. The Chinese subject in this paper was in some points separated into Taiwanese and Mandarin Chinese due to the background of the author and the interviewees. As the geographic borders are sure be one of the factor that influence the culture, future Studies might focus on a more narrowly defined subject, such as taking Taiwanese as a single subject instead of looking Chinese as a whole.

It is also the author's recommendation that a larger scale survey or interviews will be conducted, and furthermore, more propositions will be made to benefit the people who want to study or come across the real scenarios of cross-cultural communication. It will also be interesting to propose some universal solutions from learning the similarities of the different cultures for better cross-cultural communication.

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