

Culture and Conflict Management; A Chinese Perspective

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Globalization has impacted every aspect of our lives through the compression of time and space. It not only changes the old human society into a new structure and requires a new way of thinking and life style from its members, but also increases the level of interdependence among people from different cultures. As a forceful determinant of communication, culture defines the effectiveness and appropriateness of verbal and nonverbal messages and prescribes an acceptable range of behavior for a given context. Therefore, it is important for global citizens to understand and accept cultural differences. The lack of cultural awareness and proper ways to address cultural differences will result in unrealistic expectations, frustrations, conflicts, and failure in establishing a positive intercultural relationship among people from different cultures.

With their large population and impressive economic accomplishments in the last decades, Chinese people have become a major player in the world. Their behaviors affect almost every aspect of international affairs. Given the increasingly important role Chinese people play in political and economic affairs, the mutual influence and dependence between Chinese and the rest of the world is expected to be intense in the 21st century. To understand the way Chinese think and act, especially how they manage and resolve conflicts, becomes an important step in maintaining a stable and peaceful world.

This presentation aims to examine the issue of conflict management and resolution from Chinese cultural perspective, with the hope that it can help people better understand Chinese communication behaviors. Three parts of the presentation are addressed. First, the presenter argues that communication is contextually dependent and therefore an emic approach should be taken for better understanding a cultural group. Second, Paradigmatic assumptions are used to demonstrate the differences between Eastern and Western cultures¹. Finally, key concepts based on Chinese cultural values are illustrated for better understanding Chinese in the process of conflict management².

Biosketch:

Guo-Ming Chen is Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Rhode Island. He was the recipient of the 1987 outstanding dissertation award and the founding president of the Association for Chinese Communication Studies. He served as Chair of the ECA Intercultural Communication Interest Group and the co-editor of *International and Intercultural Communication Annual*. In addition to serving as an editorial board member of several professional journals, presently Chen is the Executive Director of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies and the co-editor of *China Media Research*. His primary research interests are in intercultural/organizational/global communication. Chen has published over 150 papers, book chapters, and essays, and (co)authored and (co)edited more than

30 books and journal special issues. Those books include *Foundations of Intercultural Communication*, *Communication and Global Society*, *A Study of Intercultural Communication Competence*, *Studies of Chinese Communication Behaviors*, *Chinese Conflict Management and Resolution*, and *Theories and Principles of Chinese Communication*.

Note.

1. Paradigmatic Assumptions of Eastern and Western Cultures

Ontology					
East		West			
Holistic		Atomistic			
submerged collectivistic		discrete individualistic			
Axiology		Epistemology		Methodology	
East	West	East	West	East	West
Harmonious	Confrontational	Interconnected	Reductionistic	Intuitive	Logical
indirect subtle adaptative consensual agreeable	direct expressive dialectical divisive sermonic	reciprocity we hierarchical associative ascribed	independent I equal free will achieved	subjective nonlinear ambiguous ritual accommodative	objective linear analytical justificatory manipulative

2. A sample list of key concepts of Chinese cultural values

- (1) Harmony (*hexie*): The foundation of Chinese communication
- (2) Face (*mianzi*): The dynamism of Chinese communication
- (3) Social relations (*guanxi*): The lubricant of Chinese communication
- (4) Favor (*renqing*): The debt of Chinese communication
- (5) Reciprocity (*bao*): The art of Chinese communication
- (6) Politeness (*keqi*): The fragrance of Chinese communication
- (7) Seniority (*nianzi*): The hierarchy of Chinese communication