Culture and Conflict Management: A Chinese Perspective

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University of Rhode Island
Five Parts

I. Introduction

II. Communication is Contextually Dependent

III. Paradigmatic Assumptions of Chinese Behaviors

IV. Key Concepts in Understanding Chinese Behaviors

V. Conclusion
I. Introduction

• **Cultural awareness in globalizing society** - 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.

• **Rising of China** - 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.

• **Purpose of this presentation** - to examine the issue of conflict management and resolution from Chinese cultural perspective. Three parts: (1) I’ll argue that communication is contextually dependent and therefore an emic approach should be taken for better understanding a cultural group, (2) paradigmatic assumptions are used to demonstrate the differences between East and West, and (3) key concepts based on Chinese cultural values are illustrated for better understanding Chinese in the process of conflict management.
II. Communication is Contextually Dependent

- Communication is contextually dependent and therefore an emic approach should be taken for better understanding a cultural group.
- Reflected in paradigmatic assumptions of each culture.
Table 1. National Differences on the Six Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>American (N = 50)</th>
<th>Chinese (48)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity</td>
<td>*6.22 (.99)</td>
<td>5.56 (.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>5.28 (1.34)</td>
<td>5.02 (1.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>5.12 (1.46)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>4.14 (1.82)</td>
<td>4.40 (1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>*3.76 (1.59)</td>
<td>4.52 (1.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>*3.44 (1.73)</td>
<td>4.23 (1.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05.

Table 2. Elements That Affect Conflict Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americans</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Time Constraint</td>
<td>1. My Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Don't Care the Project</td>
<td>2. I'm Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Grade on the Line</td>
<td>3. Affect Group Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Poor Performance</td>
<td>4. Grade on the Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lack of Cooperation</td>
<td>5. Lack of Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative Attitude</td>
<td>6. Poor Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Laziness</td>
<td>7. Don't Care the Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Refuse to Re-do</td>
<td>8. Time Constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Members Don't Help</td>
<td>10. Negative Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Affect Group Interest</td>
<td>11. Members Don't Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. My Authority</td>
<td>12. Not Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. The distribution of mean scores of the 20 factors

- The top five mean scores of the 20 factors are:

  (1) Relation (5.0)
  (2) Face (4.91)
  (3) Harmony (4.77)
  (4) Reciprocity (4.68)
  (5) Credibility (4.45)

### III. Paradigmatic Assumptions of East and West

#### Ontology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Atomistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>submerged collectivistic</td>
<td>discrete individualistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Axiology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmonious</td>
<td>Confrontational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirect</td>
<td>direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subtle</td>
<td>expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adaptative</td>
<td>dialectical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consensual</td>
<td>divisive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreeable</td>
<td>sermonic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Epistemology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interconnected</td>
<td>Reductionistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reciprocity</td>
<td>independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hierarchical</td>
<td>equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associative</td>
<td>free will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascribed</td>
<td>achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subjective</td>
<td>objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonlinear</td>
<td>linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambiguous</td>
<td>analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ritual</td>
<td>justificatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodative</td>
<td>manipulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achieved</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Contextual Dependence of Communication**

<table>
<thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sermonic</td>
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</tbody>
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The most eminent influence of Chinese belief on establishing a harmonious relationship in human communication is the effort to avoid being involved in a conflict. In order to pursue a conflict free interaction, Chinese have developed five communication rules:

2. Indirect expression of disapproval – implicit, evasive, intermediary.
3. Saving or making face for counterparts – Spy plane incident in Hainan Island in 2001 (face vs. fact).
4. Reciprocity – *li shang wang lai* – *xiann li hou bing*
5. Emphasis on particularistic relationships – *guanxi*

## Emic View of Asian Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Pilipino</th>
<th>Thai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>bao</strong></td>
<td><strong>amae</strong></td>
<td><strong>uye-ri</strong></td>
<td><strong>kapwa</strong></td>
<td><strong>kreng jai</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(reciprocity)</td>
<td>(message expanding and message accepting needs)</td>
<td>(complementary and obligatory reciprocity)</td>
<td>(reciprocal being)</td>
<td>(being extremely considerate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>guanxi</strong></td>
<td><strong>en</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(interrelation)</td>
<td>(predestined relation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(strategic ambiguity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ke qi</strong></td>
<td><strong>enryo-sasshi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(politeness)</td>
<td>(restraint-guessing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(the capacity to feel for another)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>miantz</strong></td>
<td><strong>omoiyari</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(face)</td>
<td>(altruistic sensitivity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>yuan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(predestined relation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
IV. Key Concept in Understanding Chinese Communication

- **Harmony** as the Foundation of Chinese Communication
- **Face**: Dynamism in Confucian Society
- Social Relations (**Guanxi**): A Chinese Approach to Interpersonal Communication
- Favor (**Renqing**): Characteristics and Practice from a Resourced-Based Perspective
- Reciprocity (**Bao**): The Balancing Mechanism of Chinese Communication
- Politeness (**Keqi**): The Fragrance of Chinese Communication
- Rites (**Li**): The Symbolic Making of Chinese Humanity
- Predestined Relation (**Yuan**): The Passionate and the Helpless of Chinese Communication
- Hierarchy (**Dengji**): A Pyramid of Interconnected Relationships
- **Chi (Qi)** Process: The Interplay of Opposites in Selected Communication Contexts
- Divination/Fortune Telling (**Zhan Bu/Xianming**): Chinese Cultural Praxis and Worldview
V. Conclusion

- The two faces of Chinese communication
- Dynamics of cultural values (Chen & Chung)
- Strategy (Ji) (Chinese compliance-gaining strategies) (Chen & Zhong)
* Factors of Chinese Compliance-Gaining Strategies

(1) Delusion  
(2) Burrowing/Misleading  
(3) Distraction  
(4) Indirect Exploration  
(5) Espionage  
(6) Adapting  
(7) Deceiving

Thank You!