

The Impact of Cultural Differences and Countermeasures in Business Negotiations

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Abstract. With the frequent economic cooperation between China and United States, culture profoundly affects the way communicate in negotiation. Therefore, it is very important to understand the cultural differences between China and the United States and the impact of these differences on the negotiation. This paper compares the differences in different aspects by studying the literature in the relevant fields and conducting case studies, collectivism versus individualism, communication styles, high power and low power cultures, and high context and low context cultures, while also addressing some ways of expressing emotions and comparing Chinese and American attitudes toward interpersonal relationships. Through the comparative analysis it found that if it reduces the impact of cultural differences in Sino-US business negotiations, the Chinese should understand each other's information in advance, unify internal opinions in advance, and pay attention to improve the content of the contract. The U.S. needs to understand Chinese humanities in advance to show sincerity and at the same time can better promote the establishment of cooperative relations, and at the same time can also better express respect for the other side. In addition, both sides should pay attention to mutual benefit and a win-win situation and should not be too concerned about their interests. This will make the whole negotiation process more smooth and more harmonious. The significance of this research is to help negotiators between the Chinese and American understand each other's culture so that they can reach a satisfactory result in the negotiation.

Keywords: Culture; Business negotiation; Interpersonal relationships.

1. Introduction

Business negotiation refers to the communication activities between two or more individuals, in the transaction of goods or services, on issues on which buyers and sellers have not reached a consensus, and try to agree on common interests, meet their respective expectations, and obtain a result that is beneficial to them.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, the relationship has not been very strong in the decades since then. However, it is undeniable that economic trade between China and the United States has brought great benefits to both sides, which have played a very important role in the cooperative relationship between China and the U.S. As the two largest economies in the world, China and the U.S. have developed their business cooperation in a way that truly maximizes economic benefits and achieves mutual benefits. This is also due to the good communication between the two sides in business negotiations.

Business negotiation has been an essential part of modern economic activities, from small personal daily shopping consumption to large economic trades between countries. Business negotiation affects all aspects of people's lives. A successful business negotiation not only allows both parties to have a deeper understanding of each other and help them reach favorable cooperation but also helps buyers and sellers to establish a friendly cooperation relationship. Business negotiation also has several characteristics. First, it is centered on economic interests, and everything revolves around interests. The second is to take the contract as the standard, focusing on the tightness and accuracy of the contract terms [1].

Not only that, but cultural factors in business negotiation are also important and cannot be ignored. Culture shapes people's consciousness and influences the way people solve problems. Different cultures cause people to develop different behavioral preferences [2]. This paper focuses on the impact of cultural differences between the United States and China on business negotiations. This paper will focus on the differences in collectivism, individualism, power relations, hierarchical culture, emotional expression, and relationship building between China and the United States. The impact of these differences on business negotiation is analyzed through case studies. And the corresponding countermeasures are proposed in a targeted manner. The purpose of this article is to help negotiators from different cultures understand the cultural differences between China and the United States and the possible effects of negotiations. These countermeasures can help negotiators prepare more fully and effectively for such negotiations in the future and make them smoother and more successful. Increase the chances of friendly cooperation between the parties.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of business negotiation between China and America

China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, and the Chinese market has become more and more open. In 2021, China became the largest trading country, and the United States became the second-largest trading country. Figure 1 depicts the total value of both the U.S. exports to China and China's exports to the U.S. from 2010 to 2020 [3]. From figure 1, a definite rising tendency of China's exports to the U.S. is present and the tendency of U.S. exports to China appears to be relatively stable but still slightly incremental. It is evident that trade between the two countries is expanding. Additionally, trade disputes between China and the United States have intensified in recent years. Therefore, business negotiation is particularly important. Business negotiation can promote the economic development of the two countries, establish friendly relationships and meet their respective interests simultaneously. However, affected by the influence of cultural differences, including different traditions and customs, between two countries, business negotiation becomes more challenging to proceed. A better understanding of the impact of cultural differences between two countries on business negotiations would help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of business negotiations.

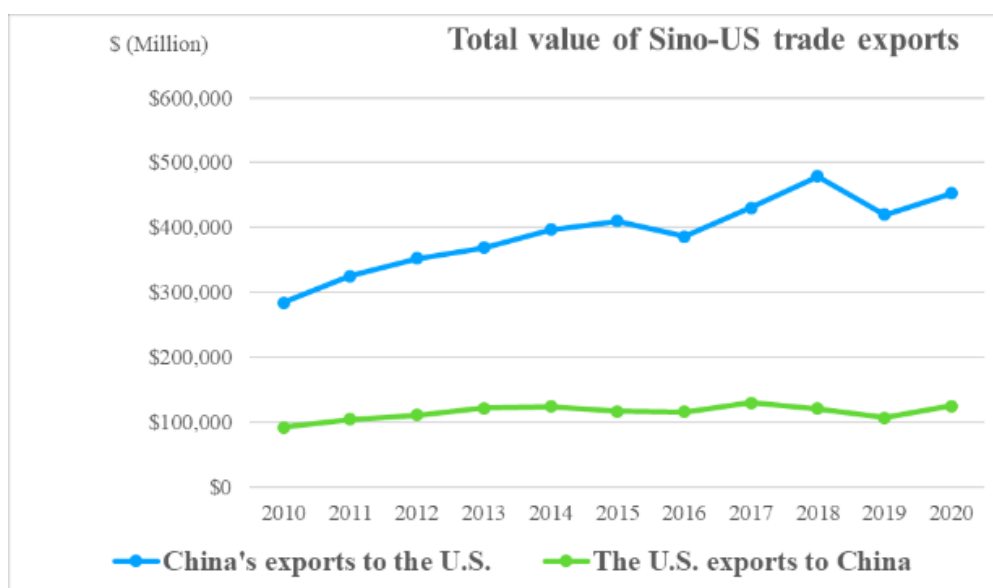


Figure 1. The total value of Sino-US trade exports (Million \$) [3]

In the Figure, the blue line shows the tendency of the total value of China's annual exports to the U.S. from 2010 to 2020; The green line shows the tendency of the total value of the U.S. annual exports to China from 2010 to 2020.

2.2. Cultural differences between China and U.S.

2.2.1 Collectivism and Individualism

Collectivism is an ideological theory that advocates that individuals belong to society, while Individualism emphasizes personal freedom, personal interests and self-control. The core of collectivism is to be more concerned about the effect of behaviors of group members, who prefer sacrificing personal interests in consideration of group interests, while the core of Individualism is to be more concerned about the aftermath of an individual's behaviors, interests, requirements, and purposes [4]. China's collectivism originated from the overall transformation of the Chinese social clan tribal alliance and the transition to the state and is heavily influenced by two important giants in China. One is Confucius. His Confucianism, a Chinese philosophical thought states that people ought to prioritize their nation. The other is Chair Mao. His idea calls for "serve the people". Both Confucianism and Chair Mao's ideas well reflect China's collectivism [5]. While America's Individualism is influenced by the American philosopher, called Ralph Waldo Emerson. He considered individualism to be a key factor in human development and social progress [5]. Therefore, under the influence of two distinctive cultures, China and the United States behave very differently. Chinese are more likely to work together to complete projects while Americans are more likely to complete projects independently.

2.2.2 Communication difference

In this section, communication is divided into verbal communication and non-verbal communication. This part will compare the cultural differences between China and the United States in verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

(1) Verbal communication

China has long been influenced by the advocacy of harmony in Confucianism. Since Chinese communicate indirectly to avoid a loss of face, Chinese verbal communication is considered implicit and vague. In China, it is almost impossible for one to say "no" outright to refuse another one's suggestions or ideas because directly saying "no" will make the person whose suggestions or ideas get refused embarrassed. Chinese generally choose an indirect way to refuse by giving a smile or saying, "let me think about it." While in America, people prefer straightforward communication to get to the point. People in America also feel comfortable while being asked questions because they think their intended meaning is well expressed and understood if there are no questions from other people.

(2) Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication consists of gestures, facial expressions and many other body languages. In China, people tend to keep a certain distance when meeting with other people for the first time and tend to keep a closer distance when meeting with someone whom they are familiar with. In America, people are more accustomed to keeping personal space from other people. Additionally, people in China avoid eye contact because staring at other people is considered impolite. While in America, people are more willing to have eye contact because having eye contact is considered as expressing interests [6].

2.2.3 High Emotionalism and Low Emotionalism

Emotionalism is the degree of expressing emotion. The Chinese are known to show low emotions because they are more likely to hide their real emotions [7]. There are rich emotional terms in the Chinese language [8], but Ethnographic studies have found that restricting emotions is encouraged in China [9]. A Chinese proverb stating that a man without a smiling face must not open a shop reflects that Chinese people should have emotional management based on their social status and responsibility. While in America., people are known to show high emotion because they tend to move and influence others by expressing high emotion. For example, Donald Trump won the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign by expressing an emotional message to the audience. He oriented the audience's attitude with his emotional message [10].

2.2.4 Relationship

Relationship in China is known as “Guanxi” and originated from the necessity of culture in self-supporting communities [6]. In China, the relationship is also described in Confucianism. Confucianism states that there are five significant relationships, which are father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife, brothers, and friends. The principle of the five relationships is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship and Principle of relationship in Confucianism

Relationship	Principle of relationship
father and son	The affection between father and son is natural, innate, and not dictated by someone
ruler and minister	A leader should be kind and be able to think about subordinates at all times, even for the sake of their families, so that subordinates will feel grateful and will be loyal to the leader. A subordinate should be loyal to responsibilities, duties, and groups.
husband and wife	The most important relationship is between husband and wife. If the relationship between husband and wife is harmonious, the family will also be harmonious, and society will be harmonious and stable.
brothers	Brothers should be courteous to each other, attach importance to friendship and despise property. As an elder brother, being friendly and caring for the younger brother are considered important; As a younger brother, respecting and obeying the elder brother are considered important. Brothers live in harmony and get along well so that parents can feel at ease they are doing filial piety.
friends	After people enter society, the most affected people are friends, so it is very important to choose friends and deal with friends.

In China, emphasis is placed heavily on relationships. While America is an interest-oriented country. People pay more attention to their interests rather than relationships. Interests may represent a short-term achievement and relationships may represent a long-term achievement [6].

2.2.5 Formality and Informality

Cultural differences may lead to different personal styles, including formality and informality. China is a world-famous country of etiquette since ancient times. Most Westerners like to arm themselves with a convenient, one-page list of etiquette how-tos before a business trip to China [11]. Chinese traditional etiquette includes etiquette when traveling, etiquette in sitting and lying down, etiquette in banquets, etiquette at weddings and funerals, etiquette at birthdays, etiquette in sacrifices and etiquette in battles. No matter what rituals are, they include two parts: the spiritual principles of the traditional ritual system and the traditional etiquette behavior. Also, The Chinese philosopher Confucius, who is well-known in China, advocated for the value of interpersonal relationships and their hierarchy [6]. People should show respect to their elders and people who are more experienced and have higher social status. Being formal when treating others shows respect. For example, Chinese people use different titles according to different identities and scenarios. The subordinate will add titles to the name of the leader when calling the leader because the subordinate admires the leader’s identity and status. While in America, despite large differences in social status and age, people still informally treat others. People may call others their first name directly without any title or last name. The reason is that Americans believe in the value of individualism and equality. They consider themselves individuals and take control of themselves.

2.2.6 High context culture and Low context culture

The role of context conveys different meanings of the message [12]. China is a country with high context culture. In high-context communication, the major meaning depends on the physical context

at that time [13]. The physical context includes the environment, tone of voice and so on. Little information is obtained from physical context only. People do not explicitly express their meaning because they want to save face and ensure harmony [13]. While compared to China, America shows low context culture. In America, people express their meanings explicitly and directly. The meaning is largely from the words themselves and nearly no implied meanings are conveyed. The main goal is to provide clear information to others and to avoid ambiguity and vagueness.

2.2.7 Xenophobia and Xenophilia

Xenophobia is the fear or distrust of anything which is from an alien environment. While Xenophilia is the appreciation of foreign culture and manners and customs. China is considered xenophobia because of Chinese history [14]. China was invaded and colonized by other countries in history. As a result, Chinese people distrust anyone and anything from foreign lands [6]. The United States is an open country and accepts immigrants. Because most Americans are not aborigines and because American aborigines are Indians, they have no xenophobic stance. Compared to Americans, the Chinese are more reluctant to accept and trust new things. On the other hand, the Chinese yearn for new technologies and high standard quality of living in western countries. The mixed and complex feeling makes Chinese paradoxical [14].

3. The impact of cultural differences between China and the United States on business negotiation

3.1. Impact of collectivism and individualism

China's collectivism and America's individualism affect the way of negotiating differently. Different ways of negotiating may bring out different durations of negotiation lasts and the outcome of a negotiation. This part will use the case of Lenovo's acquisition of IBM's PC division to illustrate the impact of collectivism and individualism on business negotiation. Lenovo was a Chinese company first called Legend and specialized in televisions. Later Lenovo shifted its business to manufacturing personal computers. And IBM was an American multinational technology company. Because Lenovo wanted to expand its PC business in the world market and because IBM lost money on its PC division, on May.1st 2005, Lenovo acquired IBM's PC division and became the world's largest personal computer vendor. During the whole process of negotiation of the acquisition, the negotiation group from Lenovo was about 100 people from different departments, such as the executive branch, research and development and so on, while the negotiation group from IBM was about half of the number of negotiators from Lenovo [5]. This situation creates a scene of many-to-little negotiations. Because of the large number of negotiators participating, negotiators from Lenovo often had an internal disagreement when negotiating with negotiators from IBM. The frequent internal disagreements may explain the reason why the whole negotiation process lasts 13 months [5]. From the case, because Chinese negotiators and American negotiators follow different principles of collectivism and individualism in business negotiation, the whole process and result of business negotiation will be different.

3.2. Impact of communication

Chinese culture's understanding of communication differs from American culture's understanding of communication during the negotiation. Misunderstandings brought on by different communication styles will complicate commercial negotiations. For example, in the Sino-U.S. negotiation, Chinese negotiators give smiles to greet but use smiles to refuse the proposals. For American negotiators, it is very difficult to understand the meaning of smiling in different situations. Always considering smiling as the acceptance of the proposals will lead American negotiators to an unfavorable situation.

3.3. Impact of emotionalism

Different degrees of emotionalism affect both the Chinese negotiation and American negotiations. Chinese negotiators show low emotionalism at the negotiation table because they are more concerned about saving face and avoiding embarrassment [7]. During the negotiation, losing face is considered as losing reputation and respect. If one displays anger that causes embarrassment, the negotiation cannot proceed smoothly. While American negotiators tend to express their real thinking by speaking their minds regardless of other people's feelings. American negotiators think that before reaching an agreement, everything should be put on the table directly even if the things discussed can make the other person feel uncomfortable [7].

3.4. Impact of relationship

Different attitudes toward relationships may lead to different goals during the negotiation. Chinese consider the goal of a negotiation, not just a signed contract but a long-term relationship. They consider building the relationship as building trust and they prioritize relationships over contracts [15]. When Chinese buyers have a little business relationships with the representatives of their suppliers, they have weak perceptions of commitment, trust, communication, and cooperation [16]. When Chinese buyers maintain a very good relationship with the representatives of suppliers, they will show high perceptions of commitment, trust, communication, and cooperation [16]. Hence, the Chinese believe a solid and long-term relationship can bring about a lot of positive things, which can ultimately lead to a successful negotiation. In China, the social network is far more valuable than skill set. No matter how smart, successful, or qualified a person is, the Chinese won't conduct business with that person if they don't know that person [6]. While Americans believe that a contract should be signed before building a relationship because the possibility to cooperate later comes with prior collaboration experience.

3.5. Impact of formality and informality

In China, formal commercial relationships are valued, whereas, in America, informal business relationships are more typical [6]. In a commercial transaction, Chinese people are more open to meeting with others of similar social standing. Arranging a subordinate to meet with a manager with superior status from another company is considered indifference. Additionally, during a business negotiation, it is impolite to call someone's name directly. As Chinese etiquette, calling people's names along with their titles is considered respectful in the negotiation. An informal manner in the negotiation will make Chinese negotiators uncomfortable. However, Americans are used to being called directly their first names and they feel uncomfortable with some etiquettes, such as bowing. Therefore, different etiquette between China and the United States will also bring different feelings to individuals in business negotiations.

3.6. Impact of high context culture and low context culture

In a high-context culture like the Chinese, personal relations, social context, and non-verbal behavior are all considered significant in business negotiation [17]. Only physical context does not fully represent the position and thoughts of Chinese negotiators. In contrast, in a low-context culture like that of the United States, people view themselves as individuals and rely on legal frameworks like contracts to carry out agreements in place of relationships [6]. For example, the Chinese are more willing to sign a contract with general principles rather than a contract including a cumbersome set of detailed terms. Furthermore, oral commitments are common in China because oral commitments are acknowledged in the Chinese Contract Law. While Americans prefer detailed contracts that try to foresee all possible eventualities. The example of the Sino-U.S. trade negotiation between 2018 and 2019 can also prove the idea. In April 2019, the governments of the United States and China agreed on broad concepts, but when the agreement was placed in writing, there were substantial differences. Because it didn't want China to make empty pledges, the U.S. administration intended to include as many specific clauses as it could to obligate China to uphold its obligations. However, the Chinese

government preferred a more flexible contract with fewer details in the agreement because the Chinese government did not want to see many forceful words, such as “must” and “should”, in the agreement [18]. In the end, the negotiations broke down in early May 2019 [18].

3.7. Impact of xenophobia and xenophilia

Obtaining trust from the Chinese is perplexing because the Chinese base trust on the relationship. Time is taken into account as a relationship indicator. The longer the relationship is maintained, the higher the trust will be. During the negotiation, the Chinese enjoy asking a lot of questions and constantly interrupting to eliminate worries [19]. Additionally, Chinese negotiators believe a pearl of Chinese wisdom stating that knowing the enemy and knowing oneself can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat. Therefore, they often do much preparation before a negotiation to fully understand every facet of the negotiation. While American negotiators are more open-minded and innovative. They are willing to accept the idea that can benefit them whether they have already heard of the idea before or not. Hence, Xenophobia in China generally leads to a time-consuming negotiation because both building trust and eliminating worries take time, while Xenophilia in America often helps American negotiators accept new ideas and focus on the interest directly.

4. Countermeasures

To better enable Chinese and Americans to better communicate in the negotiation, the following countermeasures and suggestions are made respectively.

4.1. China's Response

Understand the interests of both sides, build relationships in negotiations, and internally unify opinions first to avoid internal differences of opinion

Before the negotiation, make a detailed investigation as much as possible and prepare all kinds of relevant information. The study of intelligence information for negotiations is based on the collection and organization of relevant information materials and is the basic work of the feasibility study in the preparation stage of negotiations [20]. To fully list the information obtained from the investigation and collection, based on extensive knowledge and experience. Should examine the previous experience of the opponent, the investigation of the opponent has been involved in various matters, to understand the opponent has done every deal or business venture, but also to investigate each of his unsuccessful transactions. Often from the failure of the record to understand them, the effect is no less than the study of their success record. From both sides to study them, to help us more fully grasp, familiar with their way of thinking, action and psychological tendencies. With in-depth business intelligence, we can make better strategic decisions and take the initiative in negotiations. In Chinese culture, power dominance plays an important role in negotiation [21]. Chinese negotiating teams are characterized by a large number of negotiators and often have one or two highly qualified and respected individuals in the team to assume leadership roles. The U.S. negotiating team is usually not large, but each person has a sufficient voice, professionalism and authority recognized by the team members, thus significantly reducing the probability of disagreement within the negotiation. Americans are good at working independently, so the negotiating team can express their own opinions and generally have no dedicated leader. While the Chinese want to show respect to the other side by the status positions of the negotiating members, the U.S. sees such negotiations as a waste of time and lack of efficiency, and the negotiations are naturally not easy to conduct [22]. Despite a large number of Chinese negotiators, there is only one main negotiator. Outwardly, Chinese teams all appear to be very united, but in private they may ignore or even sacrifice the overall interests by highlighting individual capabilities or interests. There are people from different fields in the team, each holding a different opinion on the same issue. Therefore, the internal team must reach a unified view before the negotiation is successful.

4.1.1 Inclusion of interest-related content in the contract

The Chinese nation has been labeled as a cultural nation called the nation of etiquette, and counting the five thousand years of Chinese history, our deep and long cultural heritage makes us still deeply rooted in the social orientation of friendship. The Chinese contractual consciousness relies more on being built on ideology rather than fixed on a paper contract, fearing that cold words will break the cordial atmosphere [23]. The Chinese contractual consciousness also makes the Chinese believe in the importance of human relationships, leading to trust in human relationships over legal ones. As a result, the concept of contract is more oriented to verbal expression, and it is believed that the contract is not the final signed result of negotiation, accompanied by many negotiated conditions that are not mentioned in the contract, a situation that tends to lead Westerners to believe that Chinese people are faithless in their words [20]. Good contract awareness is not only the awareness of signing a contract but also includes the perfect pursuit of the required contract, and the precise pursuit of the quality and quantity of the contract. Including all the negotiated benefit conditions in the contract can better control the benefits and risks of the contract and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings as well as quarrels.

4.1.2 Focus on a win-win outcome

Most negotiators stand on their own feet and make plans to maximize their interests, but some negotiators think from the standpoint of their opponents and offer ideas that can be useful for negotiation and cooperation. In this case, it is not wise to refuse without distinguishing between reality and ideals, and this situation will lead to negative negotiations. Although both sides have considered their respective positions, interests and corresponding solutions before the negotiation, it is difficult to avoid cognitive biases and loopholes due to various reasons. The best outcome of the negotiation is a win-win situation, in which both parties exchange benefits so that the partnership can be better continued.

4.2. The United States Response

4.2.1 Respect each of your opponent's negotiators

Because of cultural differences, the negotiation team members differ between China and the United States. A negotiation team in China will have a leader who holds the initiative, but the other members are also planning participants. Due to the influence of Confucian culture, Chinese people regard hierarchical relationships as more important, and when negotiating, they need to select people of the corresponding level to negotiate, for example, if China sends a manager, the opponent also needs to send the same position as the manager and negotiate [20]. For better communication, it is important to respect each negotiator as much as possible. Pay more attention to the other party's reaction, avoid overly aggressive language, and ask questions about ambiguous areas to avoid misunderstandings.

4.2.2 Understand Chinese human culture and show sincerity

The Chinese value friends and family, and whether they are working together or not, the Chinese place a high priority on relationships between people. Chinese people negotiate and cooperate while making friends, and do not deliberately discuss business and friends separately. Chinese people focus on personal reputation and social status, so "face" is important to Chinese people. Understanding the culture and communicating reasonably so that Chinese people feel respected will make negotiations more pleasant [24].

4.3. Contractual relationships

The Chinese prefer to talk about the overall part before exploring the partial part, which is a deviation from the American way of thinking. Americans favor details that determine the overall part, which leads to different differences between the two parties in drawing up the contract during the negotiation process. Americans focus on the detailed terms of the contract and implement them

according to the detailed terms drawn up in the contract [25]. However, for the Chinese, the purpose of negotiation is to reach a consensus on the whole, and the drawing up of the contract represents the beginning of a harmonious relationship, and the Chinese focus on long-term partnership and the formation of a good relationship with the Chinese negotiation partner after the implementation of the contract is also something that can better promote cooperation and harmony.

5. Summary

This paper compares the cultural differences between China and the United States and the impact of these differences on negotiation practice. In general, there are significant cultural differences between China and the United States in many areas, and these differences are reflected in negotiation practice. To get better cooperation in negotiation, one needs to understand the information and culture of the other side.

China belongs to collectivism and is a country with a high power and high context culture. Therefore, China is more focused on collective interests and at the same time more focused on reaching a consensus as a whole. The Chinese may be more concerned with building a good cooperative relationship with others than with benefits. In addition, China appears to be more subtle in its language expressions. Chinese negotiators tend to prefer to use euphemisms and vague expressions and do not overtly reveal their true emotions. The opposite is almost true in the United States. The U.S. is individualistic and may be more concerned with profit than building a relationship. Therefore, their expressions are usually clear and direct. At the same time, they are more inclined to show their emotions to others and want to have an impact on them. Therefore, American negotiators need to pay attention to language expressions and relationship building during negotiations, while Chinese negotiators need to be more prepared for contractual details related to interests.

The purpose of this study is to enable Chinese and American negotiators to understand the cultural differences between the two sides, to respect and understand each other's culture in negotiations, and to improve the efficiency and success of negotiations. Future negotiators should do more to learn more about different negotiation cultures and bring their understanding and respect for cultural differences to negotiation practice. Relevant training and managers should also pay attention to these cultural differences to develop better cross-cultural negotiators.

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