

# A Study on the Impact of Intercultural Communication on Multinational Corporations and Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** The differences between Chinese and non-Chinese cultures in multinational enterprises in China are introduced, and how communication in different cultural contexts can be efficient and effective, avoiding unnecessary communicative conflicts and thus leading to increased efficiency. The theory of speech act is used to explore the characteristics of multicultural communication in multinational enterprises. By analyzing the speech act characteristics of employees in multinational companies, we can raise people's awareness of different cultural backgrounds, different thinking habits and different values, and help them to control the appropriateness and accuracy of their speech acts in cross-cultural communication, so as to promote cost-effective communication and efficient communication in the company.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication; Verbal Communication; Communication Barriers; Countermeasures.

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## 1. Introduction

With the deepening and further expansion of China's reform and opening up, many foreign-invested organisations and enterprises are no longer just "Made for China", but have started to take root in China and enter the "Made in China" stage. Many foreign-invested organisations and enterprises are no longer just "Made for China", but have started to establish their roots in China, entering the "Made in China" stage. As China opens its doors to reform and opening up, it will reach a higher stage of "Made with China". The Chinese economy is shifting from a stage of high growth to a stage of high-quality development, and the structure of foreign investment utilisation is being adjusted and upgraded, with high-end equipment manufacturing enterprises, enterprises with strong innovation capabilities, enterprises with high quality products and services, etc., becoming the focus of foreign investment utilisation in China in the coming period. In this context, more and more multinational enterprises with strength will start their business in China more deeply, which will inevitably make it necessary for the Chinese to communicate and exchange with partners from different countries and cultures, and this kind of cross-border business is very different from domestic trade. Differences between cultures can have a direct impact on the smooth running of cross-border business and can even lead to a breakdown of the partnership. Faced with such situations, we must respond in a correct and positive manner in order to achieve efficient intercultural communication.

## 2. Barriers in intercultural communication

### 2.1. Differences in cultural backgrounds

There are obvious cultural differences between different cultural backgrounds. The Japanese, for example, are world-renowned for their attention to detail and their pursuit of it, which is closely related to the uniqueness of Japanese culture. Japanese culture has traditionally used language not to construct an abstract, systematic, rational order of language, but in relation to concrete, non-systematic, emotional

particular scenes of life. The Japanese of all ages have expressed their ideas primarily in concrete literary works rather than in abstract philosophical thought. Japan's vast and complex system of tram networks, where trips can be scheduled in seconds, is a typical example of their quest for precision in detail. Japanese managers are used to solving problems, making plans and making decisions down to the source, and then reasoning out solutions, which is also evident in the meticulous design of processes in Japanese companies [1]. If Chinese employees communicate and cooperate with Japanese employees in a Chinese middle-of-the-road culture, it is obvious that they are caught in a whirlpool of miscommunication. What is the difference? It is a confusing expression for them to understand.

### 2.2. Differences in social etiquette

The differences between Chinese and Western cultures are clearly reflected in the rules of etiquette. While the Chinese have long advocated the "elders first" principle, Western culture advocates individual independence, and older people who are comfortable moving around do not enjoy the "elders first" treatment. However, they promote the principle of 'women first', which collides with the Chinese principle of 'elders first'. In Chinese public places, it is perfectly normal to help an elderly person, give up one's seat for an elderly person and so on, but if the elderly person were a Westerner, the Westerner might feel slighted and unhappy. In addition, Westerners place great importance on personal privacy and the development of individuality, and regard personal interest, freedom and emancipation as very sacred. If you are asked questions such as whether you are married, your age, weight or salary, you will be seen as deliberately prying into other people's lives and these questions are very inappropriate. The Chinese people are concerned with homogeneity, and this is typified by the old Chinese saying that "a gun will beat a bird out of its head" and "the wind will destroy a tree if it is in the forest". Chinese people discuss issues such as marriage, age and salary with each other as a sign of friendship and concern for each other.

### 2.3. Differences in language habits

People in East Asian countries generally communicate in a "high-context culture" and have a habit of indirect communication, using implicit and ambiguous expressions to communicate, relying on the rich hints of place and context to make the other party "understand" and "comprehend". They rely on the rich hints of place and context to allow the other person to "understand" and "comprehend". For example, when saying no, the Chinese will often say, "Let's see how it goes." "Let's see when the time comes." When saying no, they will often say, "It's okay." "This dress is quite nice, but I'd like to see something else from another shop." The Japanese, on the other hand, are better than the Chinese in this area of vague expressions, for example, they say "いいです" when expressing acceptance or non-acceptance. In Chinese, this means "yes", but in reality, it can mean either acceptance or rejection, and the exact meaning must be judged in the context of the situation and the expressions and postures of the person expressing it. In contrast, people with a 'low-context culture' such as the British and Americans place more importance on their own independent opinions, on the accuracy and exact meaning of the language itself, and on the use of "Of course!" "No problem!" "No doubt!" "It can only be so!" etc. This habit of expression is a more firm, unambiguous and clear expression of one's own position, a habit of direct communication [2].

### 2.4. Differences in lifestyle habits

The differences in living habits are most directly reflected in eating habits. In Guangzhou restaurants, the waiter will bring over a small basin to wash the dishes and pour the water before serving them. This does not mean that the dishes are not clean, but is just a long-standing habit of the locals in Guangzhou. If there are leftovers in the dishes, it is a sign of rudeness or dislike; whereas the Chinese will spread a table full of dishes to show the hospitality of their guests. If the dishes are left over, it is a sign of rudeness or dislike, whereas the Chinese will spread a full table to show the generosity and sincerity of the host. If the Chinese were to serve the Japanese with their own food habits, imagine the dilemma this would create. Even if they have lived in China for many years, they may be impressed by the colour and flavour of Chinese food, but this does not change their childhood habit of eating burger sandwiches. Chinese meat dishes with bones, such as sweet and sour pork, sautéed cowboy bones and so on, can be difficult for many Europeans and Americans to eat because the bones make their teeth uncomfortable, which may seem ridiculous to us, but it is a common habit in their food culture to eat meat without bones.

## 3. Cultural differences in the management of multinational companies in concrete terms

Individualism and collectivism: in MNCs, Western personnel focus on personal privacy, emphasise freedom, focus on individual performance and strive to make themselves outstanding in practice; Chinese employees communicate closely with each other and attach great importance to feelings and interpersonal relationships.

Power distance and uncertainty avoidance: In MNCs, Western managers encourage decentralised decision-making and managers and employees follow the company system carefully. Chinese employees identify with hierarchical

differences, managers rarely delegate their authority, and decisions are always made by the leader's "head".

Masculinity and femininity: Western managers emphasise rigid management, and managers have a more adventurous spirit. In the ways and means of management, the emphasis is on a rigid mechanical approach to management. As a result, institutionalised management is usually implemented and everything is based on the system. Chinese leaders, on the other hand, place more importance on cohesion and centripetal force among employees. Therefore, possess more flexibility and are more concerned with human feelings.

In the two dozen countries and regions surveyed by Hofstede, the "long-term orientation" explains the development of the economy very well. He argues that although corporate behaviour may appear to be similar between companies, the underlying national values are very different, and that the differences between national cultures are more about values than anything else. The Chinese have a hard-working spirit and are more focused on building long-term, stable relationships, balancing economic benefits with social benefits and human relations. Western managers operate with the goal of maximising short-term gains. This is due to the fact that the West is influenced by a culture of short-term orientation, where employees can change jobs and companies at any time, and where managers and employees are not seen as a whole working towards a common goal and sharing common benefits over the long term, so managers always want to get more benefits as quickly as possible and then move on to the next more lucrative place.[3] Westerners are relatively more concerned with immediate benefits and usually try to work out solutions to achieve their goals, tending to arrive at quick results.

Neutral and emotional; relationship specific relationship diffuse: In multinational enterprises, Western personnel, due to the influence of emotional and relationship specific, are more obviously emotional outward, friendly to people, willing to help strangers, will smile and greet strangers, so when communicating, they are usually more proactive, can give each other trust, the first time you can get feedback; while most Chinese people are influenced by Chinese culture, emotional They are more subtle in their communication and have a better ability to read people's words, so often they need to be attentive to what they are trying to convey. It takes a lot of testing and patience to gain the trust of the other person, and once gained, it usually leads to a long-lasting relationship.

Universalism and particularism, focus on personal achievement and focus on social hierarchy: The West is mostly influenced by universalism, there is only one truth in people's minds, only one way of solving problems, if they make a mistake once, they will be dragged into the "blacklist" and it is difficult to gain their trust again. Chinese people, on the other hand, like to analyse specific problems, are flexible and willing to give people a second chance. In addition, Westerners value personal competence and respect managers with knowledge and skills, so many Western managers are highly educated or technically skilled. In China, however, respect is related to age and seniority. So when working together, the styles of both managers can be quite different and the time taken to gain mutual trust can seem longer.

## **4. Countermeasures to improve communicative efficiency**

### **4.1. Improve their own intercultural communication skills**

Employees of multinational companies can improve their intercultural communication skills from the following aspects: when selecting employees, multinational companies should not only consider their technical ability and management experience, but also test their ability to adapt to new environments, new lifestyles and new cultural acceptance; the company should train employees on intercultural knowledge, make them aware of the differences between different cultures, deepen their understanding and cognition of foreign cultures, reduce the confusion and uncertainty brought about by foreign cultures, and adapt to working life in an intercultural and diversified context as soon as possible[4].

Employees should consciously observe the characteristics and habits of foreign cultures; if there are more European and American colleagues among multinational employees, Chinese employees who are in a position to do so can learn about the Bible to enhance their cultural sensitivity, as it is a major component of traditional Western culture and its teachings permeate all levels of Western society, with influence spreading over philosophy, politics, economics, literature, art and even all aspects of daily life. If you want to communicate with your European and American colleagues more deeply and smoothly, you cannot get around it in any way; you should actively engage in social activities with people from different cultural backgrounds; Chinese employees should develop their own awareness and sense of identity of their own culture so that they can give accurate and appropriate explanations with persuasive power when socialising with foreign colleagues, so that both sides can consciously prevent and avoid cultural conflicts in their daily interactions.

### **4.2. Mutual respect for each other's culture**

Each country has its unique culture because of its history, geographical features, beliefs and so on, and there is no high or low culture, the first thing employees in multinational companies should do is to communicate in a fair way of thinking. The Italians like to eat burger sandwiches, it is not appropriate to force them to eat Sichuan food and drink Guangzhou's old hot soup; the Japanese will make sucking sounds to indicate the deliciousness of the noodles, but this is not polite in the eyes of the Chinese, but it is obviously unfair to accuse them of this. I once worked in a large Sino-Japanese joint venture. When the company celebrated its anniversary, the Japanese staff decorated the hall with a lot of care, but when the Chinese staff arrived they were surprised because the walls of the hall were covered with white cloth, which is apparently unlucky in Chinese customs. When the Japanese staff realised that something was wrong, they explained and gained the understanding of everyone. For the rest of the celebrations afterwards, they were prepared in full accordance with Chinese cultural customs, in a harmonious and natural way, which is a good example of mutual respect. It is also important to respect each other's customs and taboos, such as the attitude towards death. The Chinese are full of fear of

death, believing that the dead are the greatest and that it is better to die than to live, whereas in the West, contrary to us, they are influenced by Christianity and praise death, which for them is not the final end of life, but a relief from the reality of a redeemed life, another form of existence. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why there was such a huge reaction from Chinese netizens when Chinese tourists travelling in Sweden last year were placed near a church by the police near a cemetery.

### **4.3. Efforts to build a "common culture" unique to multinational companies**

Although there are differences in the cultures of different countries and regions, this does not exclude the existence of commonalities between different cultures. Multinational companies should actively explore the commonalities between different cultures, and take these commonalities as a basis to establish a set of standards that we all recognise, under which communication and interaction will easily resonate, and the efficiency of communication will be self-evident. Multinational companies themselves should consider cultural integration and use environmental pressures, organisational competencies and leadership skills to analyse cross-cultural conflicts. A "culture of commonality" should embody several basic principles: appropriateness, i.e. building a unique organisational culture embedded in the host country; systemic, cross-cultural management practices should be supported by a system; equal, no one culture is superior to another; cultural permeability, two different cultures can influence and permeate each other. An important initiative of the intercultural management strategy is the development of intercultural management of human resources; the promotion of Chinese culture and intercultural communication through exchange. In intercultural communication, each party should not lower itself to the other's cultural customs, but should adhere to the 'principle of moderation' and, on the basis of equal exchange, carefully appreciate the essence of the other's culture and make use of it, so as not to embarrass both parties, but not to put themselves in a passive position, while adhering to their own cultural characteristics and at the same time learning from the other's culture. In this way, both sides will not be embarrassed and they will not be passive, while adhering to their own cultural characteristics, they will also learn from the essence of the other side's culture, forming a unique "common culture" within the company and achieving twice the result with half the effort in cross-cultural communication.

## **5. Conclusion**

In multinational enterprises, the barrier of intercultural communication is like an invisible mountain that exists in reality. When we cannot solve it well, this mountain will appear and cross in front of us, which will seriously weaken the effectiveness of internal communication and generate unnecessary internal consumption; however, when we successfully cross this mountain, integrate the advantages of mutual culture and create an efficient communication mode, it will become the invisible wings of multinational companies to surprise and win in business competition. As the cooperation between foreign companies in China deepens, company managers should be fully aware of the importance of efficient cross-cultural communication in their daily management operations, try to avoid frictional barriers caused

by cultural differences, respect different cultural values and create an efficient and comfortable corporate communication atmosphere.

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