Unit 1  Culture and Intercultural Communication

Learning Objectives 学习目标

• 定义和解释文化与跨文化交际的概念。
• 探讨不同文化背景下的交际特点。
• 理解文化差异对交际的影响。

Lead-in 单元导入

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Pre-class Activity 课前活动

Understanding the cultural differences of any nation which we choose to do business with will require great efforts. To be successful in international business and to be good citizens of the international community, we should learn to honor and respect our own cultures and also to develop an appreciation, tolerance, and respect for others’ cultures. All of us, no matter how hard we try, will commit some social blunders related to cultural differences. The important thing to remember is that if we create an environment of mutual understanding and respect through our attitude and actions, our blunders are usually met with understanding and forgiveness. Have you ever realized that your life is greatly affected by the culture and communication you’re living in? What are culture and communication? How can we avoid culturally related business blunders in China? What’s the relationship between them? Please have a discussion with your neighbor and air your view to your classmates.

Reading 课内阅读

Reading One: The Iceberg Model of Culture

The Iceberg Model of Culture was proposed by Edward T. Hall (1976), who indicated that the smaller part of the iceberg above water represents those aspects of your own culture that you are aware of. The larger part of the iceberg represents deep culture which is hidden below the surface of conscious awareness (Figure 1.1). Deep culture consists of feelings, thoughts and behaviors which you may never have reflected on because they are so familiar that they are part of you. This model which is often used in seeking to understand cultural differences reflects a psychoanalytic (精神分析的) frame of reference.

Becoming bicultural or multicultural (成为双文化或多元文化) is a process of becoming more accepting and tolerant of different ways. This is not easy but it may be possible to understand that the person you clashed with did not intend to upset you, but was simply doing what they were used to. In societies where relationships are hierarchical (有等级的), and where communications are indirect, a breach of the cultural norms may be regarded as a serious matter. Many miscommunications are based on poor understanding of the other person’s culture. If you are bilingual you can change to the language of the other person; if

not, you are at a disadvantage. Similarly, if you are bicultural or multicultural you can choose to behave in ways that are expected and acceptable in a different culture. It becomes second nature to greet people by shaking their hands in Sweden, nodding in England, kissing in France and putting your hands together under your chin in India. If you are a man you will understand that it will probably be taken amiss ([破烂不堪])......;......

Not every difference is as easy to come to terms with as those of greeting. One problem we may face is what to tolerate and what not to tolerate. We may need to examine our legal, moral and ethical boundaries. Some share the value that customs and habits can be tolerated if they are not harmful to use or to another person, nor destructive to another person’s property. In some parts of the world, some of us may find the law morally and ethically unacceptable and we have to decide where to draw our personal boundaries and how to protect ourselves in such situations.

Another challenge can be found around food. It is very helpful to educate ourselves on the food habits of different cultural and religious groups. It is embarrassing for roast pork to be served to a Muslim or a Jew. If you have grown up with dietary prohibition with accompanying beliefs, you may choose to stick to the food you are used to even if you no longer believe in the reasons. The philosopher Arthur Koestler writes about his grandfather insisting that his Jewish ([破烂不堪]) grandson should not be confined to the same rules as he was. One young development worker made the decision to eat meat when she was working in remote areas of Ecuador ([破烂不堪]) although she was a confirmed vegetarian.


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Reading Two: The Cultural Onion: Layers of Culture

Culture can be interpreted in different ways. We look at culture from a special perspective this time to compare culture with an onion. Similar to an onion, culture consists of many layers (Figure 1.2). Much like what has been described in the culture iceberg, the outer layer of culture consists of symbols, such as the way people are dressed, the language they speak, the cars they drive, the food they eat, the houses they live in, etc. It includes all the direct contents in the field of culture-language, food, housing, all the products of arts and so on. This is the level of explicit culture.

![The Cultural Onion](image)

**Figure 1.2 The Cultural Onion**

Middle layer: criterion (☐ ☐ ) and sense of worth. Criterion and sense of worth lead to the recognition of being right and wrong. People’s behaviors and ways of communication are affected by criterion and sense of worth. But they are not visible, despite their influence on what happens in the observable surface.

Deep layer: basic judgment. People have a basic judgment on the questions: What is life? How to deal with the problems appearing in life? What is beauty ... This is the deepest layer: the level of implicit culture. Understanding the core of the culture onion is the key to successfully working with other cultures. The core consists of basic assumptions, a series of rules and methods to deal with the regular problems that it faces. Every culture has developed its own set of basic assumptions. These assumptions are very difficult for an outsider to recognize, and can be measured by dimensions. Each dimension is like a continuum. Cultures differ in how they deal with these dimensions, but they do not differ in needing to make some kind of response. These methods of problem-solving have become so basic that, like breathing, we no longer think about how we do it.
Reading Three: The Characteristics of Culture

Six characteristics of culture have special significance for intercultural communication: ①Culture is learned, ②culture is shared, ③culture is dynamic, ④culture is symbolic, ⑤the facets (④ ⑤ ⑥) of culture are interrelated, and ⑥culture is ethnocentric (Figure 1.3).

![Cultural Characteristics Diagram]

Figure 1.3 The Characteristics of Culture

**Culture is not genetic; it is learned.** From infancy on, members of a culture learn their patterns of behavior and ways of thinking until they have become internalized. The power and influences of these behaviors and perceptions can be seen in the ways in which we acquire culture. Our culture learning proceeds through interaction, observation, and imitation. A little boy in North America whose father tells him to shake hands when he is introduced to a friend of the family is learning culture.

All of this learning occurs as conscious or unconscious conditioning that leads one toward competence in a particular culture. This activity is frequently called acculturation, denoting the total activity of learning one’s culture.

**Culture is shared.** Members of a culture share a set of ideas, values, and standards of behaviors, and this set is what gives meaning to their lives, and bonds them together as a culture. For example, almost all people living in China share the Chinese language, dress themselves in similar styles, eat similar food, and celebrate many of the same holidays or festivals. When Spring Festival comes, for example, Chinese people all over the world will celebrate it in the same way, wearing new clothes, setting off firecrackers, eating dumplings, extending good wishes for the New Year, having antithetical couplets on doors and hanging lanterns.

**Culture is dynamic (④ ⑤ ⑥).** As with communication, culture is ongoing and subject
to fluctuation; cultures seldom remain constant. As ideas and products evolve within a culture, they can produce change through the mechanisms of invention and diffusion.

Invention is usually defined as the discovery of new practices, tools or concepts that most members of the culture eventually accept. The invention of television is a good example of how products reshaped a culture.

Change also occurs through diffusion, or borrowing from another culture. The assimilation of what is borrowed accelerates as cultures come into direct contact with each other. For example, as Japan and North America share more commerce, we can see Americans assimilating Japanese business management practices and the Japanese incorporating American marketing tactics.

**Culture is symbolic.** People have culture primarily because it enables them to communicate with symbols. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and to exchange them with others. Language and other forms of symbolic communication, such as art, enable people to create, explain, and record new ideas and information. In China, children usually give senior parents a birthday cake with a large peach on it on their birthdays, wishing them a long life. The cake here is called Good-health Cake, a symbol of good health and longevity.

**Facets of culture are interrelated.** This characteristic serves to inform us that culture is like a complex system. As Hall clearly states, “You touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected.” The women’s movement in the US may serve as an example of this. Women’s movement may be but two simple words but the phenomenon has been like a large stone cast into a pond. The movement has brought about change in gender roles, sexual practices, educational opportunities, the legal system, career opportunities, and even female-male interaction.

**Culture is ethnocentric.** The characteristic of ethnocentrism being centered on one’s own group, might well relate most directly to intercultural communication. The important tie between ethnocentrism and communication can be seen in the definition of the word itself. Keesing notes (1974) that ethnocentrism is a “universal tendency for any people to put its own culture and society in a central position of priority and worth”. Ethnocentrism, therefore, becomes the perceptual window through which a culture interprets and judges all other cultures. Ethnocentrism leads to a subjective evaluation of how another culture conducts its daily business. That this evaluation can only be negative is clear if you realize that a logical extension of ethnocentrism is the position that “our way is the right way”. Most discussions of ethnocentrism even enlarge the concept to include feelings of superiority.

As we have seen, culture is extremely complex and influences every aspect of our lives. There are, however, specific aspects of culture that are of particular interest in the study of intercultural communication. For the sake of simplicity and to put some
limitations on our discussion, we will examine three major elements; *perceptual processes, verbal processes, and nonverbal processes*.

These three interacting cultural elements are the constituent elements of intercultural communication. When we combine them, as we do when we communicate, they are like the components of a *quadraphonic* (,) stereo system — each one relates to and needs the others to function properly. In our discussion, we separate these elements to identify and discuss them. But in actuality they do not exist in isolation nor do they function alone.

**Read to Learn More**

**Definitions of Culture and Intercultural Communication**

Have you ever realized that your life is greatly affected by the culture and communication you’re living in? You’ve probably heard about many different definitions of the word “communication”. But what on earth are culture and communication? Let’s take a look in this section.

Culture is such a pervasive (;) and evasive (;) concept that so many scholars have tried to convey it from different aspects and disciplines. Definitions of culture range from all-encompassing () ones, such as “it is everything”, to narrow ones, like “it is opera, art and ballet”. The most widely accepted definition is created by Edward T. Hall (1959), “Culture is the total accumulation () of beliefs, customs, values, behavior in situations and communication patterns that are shared, learned and passed down through the generations in an identifiable group of people”.

Intercultural communication is a form of communication that aims to share information across different cultures and social groups. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode () messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted. As a separate notion, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact.

**Reducing Stereotypes and Prejudice in Intercultural Communication**

To have effective intercultural communication, people need to ensure that messages are communicated accurately. As Gundykunst (1998) writes; “To communicate effectively, we must transmit our messages in a way that strangers (people of other cultural backgrounds) can understand what we mean, and we need to interpret strangers’ messages in the way they meant them to be interpreted.”
Stereotypes are a form of generalization about some group of people, or a means of organizing images into fixed and simple categories that are used to stand for the entire collection of people. This kind of generalization may be positive or negative. But most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush.

Stereotypes can be found in the media because of the biases of writers, directors, producers, reporters and editors. But stereotypes can also be useful to the media because they provide a quick identity for a person or group that is easily recognized by an audience. When deadlines loom, it’s sometimes faster and easier to use a stereotype to characterize a person or situation, than it is to provide a more complex explanation.

Prejudice refers to negative attitudes towards other people that are based on faculty and inflexible stereotypes. It is an unfair, biased, or intolerant attitude towards another group of people (Lusting & Koester, 2013).

Stereotypes and prejudice can lead to errors in interpretations of the behaviors of others. They can also lead to errors in interpretations about the future behaviors of others. Successful intercultural communication requires an ability to move beyond stereotypes and prejudice and to respond to the individual objectively.

Empathy
(1) Be open-minded in terms of information sharing.
(2) Be imaginative in correctly drawing the picture of other’s situations.
(3) Show a commitment or strong willingness to understand our culturally different partners in any kind of situation.

Involve
(1) Involve others in your world and involve yourself in others’.
(2) Don’t build walls between people and learn from one another.

Be Wise
(1) Be aware of how to interact with people with respect and knowledge.
(2) Show maturity of thought and action in dealing with people.

Cross-cultural Awareness
(1) Learn a new language and be exposed to a new culture.
(2) Get rid of our ethnocentric tendencies and accept another culture on its own terms.
(3) Become more aware of the influence of cultural values.

It is important to remember that although many moments of discomfort occur when we are interacting with people from other cultures, no one culture is inherently better or worse than any other. Each culture has its own set of values, norms and ways of doing things that are considered “right” for it. That one culture’s way of doing things is right for its people does not necessarily mean it is “right” for everybody, and herein lies the
potential conflict in cross-cultural encounters.

In-class Activity 课堂练习

I. Comprehension questions.
Go over this unit and try to make an assessment on what you have learned with the following questions.
1. What do culture and intercultural communication mean? Please give some examples to support your points.
2. What are the two main images of culture?
3. In intercultural communication, what may become a barrier to a successful communication? Then how can you avoid it? Please give some detailed suggestions.

II. Comparative analysis.
Insert the phrase “intercultural/cross-cultural communication” into a search engine on the Internet and report to your group what you can find out about the studies of intercultural communication both at home and abroad.

III. Culture image exploration.
Think about the following similes and metaphors. How do you think about culture related to these references?
1. Culture is like an iceberg.
2. Culture is our software.
3. Culture is like the water a fish swims in.
4. Culture is the grammar of our behavior.

IV. Case study.
1. Is “[]” a dragon?
Huang Guangqin studies in America. One day she had a chat with her hostess Susan about family relationships and child-raising.
She said, “in China, the parent is more likely to make the decision for the child, and the children are not supposed to make their own decisions when they’re young.”
Susan said, “Really? But in America, every person is encouraged to act independently and be responsible for his actions, so children are encouraged at an early age to start making decisions. This allows them to learn to express their individual desires and make choices.”
Guangqin said, “But whatever the parents do, they do it for the sake of their children since all the parents in China hope their children will be dragons.”
After hearing that, Susan felt very surprised. “Dragons? Why do your Chinese parents hope their children will be Monsters?”
Questions
(1) What is the conflict of the case?
(2) Why does Susan think that Chinese parents hope their children will be Monsters?
2. What does wenhua/culture mean?

Dear tutor,

I have heard or read “wenhua” a lot which sounds a bit confusing to me. I remember you told me that “wenhua” means culture, but the other day I saw a notice in Chinese at our dorm and I asked the cleaning woman to read it and tell me what it was about. But she said,”去去去，去去去，去去去”。

While yesterday, I asked Liu Ming, my Chinese Kungfu coach, to a gallery show but Mr. Liu declined by saying, “去去去，去去去”。

This evening I attended a lecture by Mr. Wang about tea. I enjoyed it very much. Wang started the lecture by saying,“去去去，去去去，去去去”。

Question
Could you tell me what wenhua/culture means in the above situations?

V. Word match.

In Column A there are some key ideas in intercultural communication. Please match each item with its corresponding information in Column B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. communication</td>
<td>A. the communication between African Americans and European Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. international communication</td>
<td>B. the process whereby one person transmits a message through a channel to another, with some effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. interpersonal communication</td>
<td>C. the communication between culturally similar individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. interracial communication</td>
<td>D. the communication between two people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. intercultural communication</td>
<td>E. the comparison of cultural phenomena in different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. cross-cultural communication</td>
<td>F. interactions among people from different nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. intracultural communication</td>
<td>G. face-to-face interactions among people of diverse cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. intrapersonal communication</td>
<td>H. communication we have with ourselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background Information 背景知识

1. Culture(Edward T. Hall)
2. Intercultural communication

3. Cultural onion

4. Cultural iceberg

5. Stereotypes

6. Prejudice

Cultural Kaleidoscope 文化万花筒