

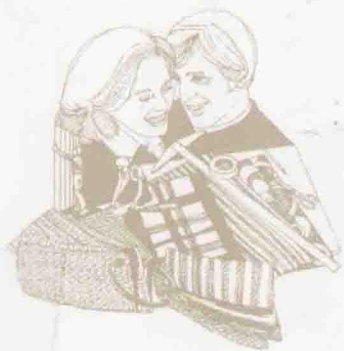


中外文化概览

Outline of World Cultures

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河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材

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河北人民出版社

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

中外文化概览 / 葛蕴鲜, 王小平编. — 石家庄: 河北人民出版社, 2010.7

ISBN 978 - 7 - 202 - 05409 - 3

I. 中… II. ①葛… ②王… III. 商务 - 英语 - 高等学校: 技术学校 - 教材 IV. H31

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2009)第 184352 号

河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材编写委员会

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丛 书 名 河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材

书 名 中外文化概览

总 主 编 葛蕴鲜 王小平

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责任编辑 唐 丽 赵黎黎

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责任校对 李 耘

出版发行 河北人民出版社(石家庄市友谊北大街 330 号)

印 刷 河北新华印刷二厂

开 本 787 × 1092 毫米 1/16

印 张 25.25

字 数 569000

版 次 2010 年 7 月第 1 版 2010 年 7 月第 1 次印刷

印 数 1 - 3000

书 号 ISBN 978 - 7 - 202 - 05409 - 3/G · 1821

定 价 41.00 元

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前 言

改革开放以来，党和国家高度重视职业教育，我国的职业教育有了迅速的发展。职业教育不仅已成为教育事业的重要组成部分，而且成为社会发展的重要基础，成为促进就业和经济发展、提高国家竞争力的重要途径。近十几年来，国家相继启动了示范性职业技术学院和示范性软件职业技术学院建设，建立了多批示范性办学基地。随着高职高专教育的迅速发展，有高职高专特色的教材成为越来越迫切的需要。因此，国家陆续出版了相关教材，并引进了一批国外优秀的职业技术教材，丰富了我国高职高专教育教材的种类和内容。

但是，目前国内高职高专的商务英语专业教材还不能满足实际教学的迫切需求。为了满足商务英语教学的需要，填补我省在商务英语教材出版方面的空白，河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材编写委员会于2007年成立，由河北经贸大学副校长杨欢进教授任主任，河北人民出版社总编辑马千海任副主任。委员会多次组织本省部分高职院校的相关专家反复研讨论证，决定编写一套具有创新教育意识的高职高专系列教材。

教材的编者全部来自商务英语教学一线，他们不但了解教学的实际需求，更了解高职学生的现状和特点，该系列教材渗透了他们的心血。在此，河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材编写委员会向付出辛勤劳动的教材编写人员表示亲切的慰问，向为教材编写出版默默奉献的同志们表示崇高的敬意，向支持教材出版的河北人民出版社表示衷心的感谢。

我们有理由相信该套商务英语系列教材问世后，河北省的商务英语专业教育将更加富有特色，教学质量会得到进一步提高。由于该系列教材还在陆续完善之中，书中难免出现不妥之处，希望大家在使用过程中及时把意见反馈给我们，让我们共同推进高职人才培养模式的改革与创新，高歌高职教育改革与发展的重要旋律。

河北省高职高专商务英语系列教材编写委员会

2010年1月

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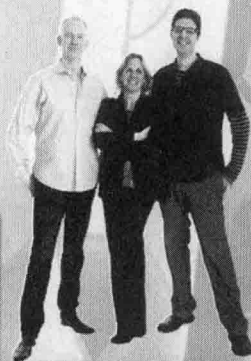
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MULAN

Part I

Intercultural Communication



Chapter1 Introduction to Culture

1. Definition of Culture

The term “culture” has many different meanings. Some may interpret it as a good understanding of music, fine arts, and literary works. Others, archaeologists, for example, may think it as pieces of ancient bricks. Some social scientists regard it as consisting of the symbolic, conceptional, and intangible aspects of human societies. For our purpose of study, we adopt the anthropologists’ view of culture.



Petroglyphs (岩画) in Ningxia, China, dating back to the Neolithic era.

Damen, L. (1987) defines culture as “learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind’s primary adaptive mechanism”.

From this definition, we can find that culture refers to patterns that concern our everyday life. Edward T. Hall, the American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, claimed, “There is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture.” Culture is an adaptive mechanism that can help human beings to survive in the changing natural environments.

However, culture is invisible. It is subject to change just because it exists only in our minds. The visible things, such as the food and drinks we have at table, the bunch of flowers in reception, or the written language, that distinguish one social group from another are merely representation or products of culture. They are not culture in themselves. Even the antiques the archaeologists dig up are only material remains that reflect cultural patterns.

2. Cultural Universals

Culture is unique to a specific social group. So the United States has American culture, China Chinese culture and Japan Japanese culture. And different ethnic groups in one

country or different communities may have subcultures too. For example, in China, the Tibetans, Manchus, Mongolians and many other ethnic groups have their special living patterns or models; people living in South China have different models from those in the North. And they also share something in common as all of them belong to the bigger culture—Chinese culture.

Even though different cultures have developed their own specific patterns, all cultures have some traits in common. The traits and patterns that are common to all human cultures worldwide are called cultural universals. Elements of cultural universals can distinguish one culture from another. To quote from Samovar, L. and R. Porter (2004), these elements may include history, religion (or worldview), values, social organization and language.

2.1 History

Every culture has its history. And history is passed on from generation to generation. The stories of the past offer the members of a culture part of their identity while highlighting the culture's origins or traditions. All cultures pass on a history that helps shape their members, each history is unique to a particular culture and carries a specific cultural message. The Americans appreciate their ancestors' pilgrim voyage to the New World, while the Chinese may be proud of the building of the Great Wall.

2.2 Religion or Worldview

Another feature of all cultures is their religion or worldview. The influence of religion or worldview can be seen in the entire structure of a culture. Both consciously and unconsciously, and in varied degrees, religion or worldview impacts everything from business practices (the Protestant work ethic) to politics (the link between Islam and government) to individual behavior (a code of ethics).

2.3 Values

Values are cultural standards or judgments of what is right, good, or desirable. The connection between values and culture is so strong that it is hard to talk about one without the other. Values help determine how people ought to behave. For example, all cultures have a value toward the elderly, but it is often very different as you move from culture to culture. In most Asian countries, the elderly are highly respected and revered. They are even sought out for advice. This is quite different in the United States, where the emphasis

is on youth.

2.4 Social Organization

Another feature found in all cultures is social organizations, which are also referred to as social systems or social structures. They represent the various social units, such as the family, government, schools and tribes, all of which help the members of the culture organize their lives. Social organizations help establish your circle of communication (e.g. your friends and relatives) and regulate norms of personal, familial and social conduct. Social organizations are unique to each culture. For example, in some cultures there are kings and queens, while in others presidents and prime ministers. In some cultures, polygamy is a common practice, in others it is prohibited by law. Within a social structure, culture assigns roles to the various players—whether you should bow to or shake hands with someone you meet, and how you should dress depend on the culture you are in and your role in a social organization.

2.5 Language

Language is another feature that is common to all cultures and that allows the members of the culture to communicate with one another. Language, of course, includes not only words but other symbols; it also includes the rules for combining them in sentences, songs, pictures, etc. (Macdonis, J.) Language enables the members of the culture to share ideas, feelings, and information. It is also a medium to pass on a culture from generation to generation. Whether it be English, Swahili, Chinese, or French, the languages are specific for different cultures.

3. Characteristics of Culture

According to the definition and cultural universals cited above, cultures around the world share some common characteristics: culture is shared, learned based on symbols, it is an integrated system, and subject to change.

3.1 Culture Is Shared

All the people of a society collectively create and maintain a culture. Societies preserve culture for much



Chinese People in Xi'an are celebrating Christmas.

longer than the life of any one person. They keep it in the form of knowledge (scientific discoveries), objects (works of art), and traditions (holidays).

Culture is shared by the people living together in the same society. For example, almost all people living in China speak Chinese, dress in similar styles, eat many of the same foods, and celebrate the Spring Festival, National Day and other holidays.

Culture can also be shared across societies. Since no human society exists in complete isolation, different societies also exchange and share culture. In fact, all societies have some interactions with others. In the past, products bearing Chinese culture were shared by people in Middle and West Asia and even the Europeans through the Silk Road. Maize and tomato originated from America were spread to the world. Today, many people around the world use similar kinds of technology, such as cars, telephones, and televisions. Commercial trade and communication technologies, such as computer networks, have created a form of global culture. Therefore, it has become increasingly difficult to find culture that is shared within only a single society.

Cultural exchange can provide many benefits for all societies. But sometimes such exchanges can cause damage to a culture.

3.2 Culture Is Learned

People are not born with culture; they have to learn it. Any normal baby can be placed into any family on earth and grows up to learn their culture and accept it as his or her own. We may learn culture from a large variety of sources. Family, church and school are the most powerful “teaching forces”. Besides, there are also some of the more invisible “instructors” and “instructions” (Samovar and Porter, 2004). These instructors are: proverbs, folktales, legends and myths, art and mass media.

Proverbs are usually brief lines, but they are words of wisdom. They can reflect the value and worldview of a culture. Folktales, legends and myths tell stories that are intended to transmit the important aspects of the culture from person to person and from generation to generation. And the subject matter of these cultural stories concerns the fundamentals of human existence: where we and everything in our world came from, why we are here, and where we are going. A trip to any museum in the world quickly reveals how the art of a culture is yet another method of passing on culture. Mass media, such as books, magazines and newspapers, radio, and television, contain messages of culture. They are

very powerful in promoting cultures.

3.3 Culture Is Based on Symbols

According to Macionis, a symbol is anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share culture. So an object, picture, or particular mark is a symbol, written words or sounds are symbols, too. Symbols are vehicles of culture, without symbols, cultural transmission might be impossible.



In Hinduism, the cow is a

The symbols may take various forms. The Five-starred Red Flag symbolizes P. R. China; a ring on the ring finger symbolizes someone that is married; and a bow or a handshake may stand for a greeting.

3.4 Culture Is an Integrated System

Cultures is composed of parts that are related to each other. In order to keep the culture functioning, all the parts must be integrated. For example, the worldview of a culture may influence the values, and the values will influence the family size, the work ethic and even spiritual pursuits of a culture. Sometimes, changes in spiritual pursuits and work ethic may in turn affect the family size, values and worldview. Moreover, culture is subject to change.

3.5 Culture Is Subject to Change

Cultures is passed on from generation to generation. In this process, new cultural traits are added, some old ones are lost because they are no longer useful. For example, most city dwellers today do not have or need the skills required for survival in a wilderness. But what is the most important in modern urban life is the ability to drive a car, use a computer, and understand how to obtain food in a supermarket or restaurant.



Left: a Chinese girl with bound feet in the Qing dynasty. Right: a modern Chinese girl is trying on sandals.

Changes may take place as a result of both inventions within a society and the spread of cultural traits from

one society to another. In the 19th century, French and English became official languages in many countries because of the expansion of their colonialism. Last century, with the Women's Movement, women were no longer just housewives. They can get the same job and the same pay as men. This change may further influence the structure of a family.

4. Classifications of Culture

Cultures can be classified according to different standards. By regions, they can be classified into Chinese culture, Japanese culture, American culture and so on. By religions or ethnic groups, there are Arabic culture or Islamic culture, Christian culture, Germanic culture, etc. What we are going to deal with here are cultures categorized by value tendencies (individualism and collectivism) and by communication style (high-context culture and low-context culture).

4.1 Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism holds that the individual is the single and most important unit in a society and the ultimate standard of value. This view does not deny that societies exist or that people benefit from living in them, but it sees society as a collection of individuals, not something over and above them. Individualism emphasizes independence and personal achievement. Individualists hold that every person is an end in himself and that no person should be sacrificed for the sake of another. To them, individuality is of greatest value. Western countries, such as the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand tend towards individualism.

In cultures that have the value tendency of individualism, competition rather than cooperation is encouraged. Much more importance is attached to personal goals than community goals. Therefore, the loyalty of the individualists to a community will be very weak, for they think they belong to many communities, they may constantly shift from one group to another.

In a culture of collectivism, there is a solid social framework that distinguishes between in-groups and out-groups. People depend on their in-group (relatives, families, clans and organizations) to look after them, so they should be faithful to their group. In this kind of culture "we" rather than "I" is emphasized. Achievements are considered as products of a community. Group needs are placed above personal needs. Countries like China, Pakistan, Colombia, Peru and many African countries belong to this kind of culture.

Members of collective cultures seldom make decisions by themselves. For them, the group is considered the primary, and the standard of moral value.

4.2 High-context Culture vs. Low-context Culture

In his book, *Beyond Culture*, Edward T. Hall (1976) put forward the terms high-context culture and low-context culture. To make it clear, context here refers to the information that surrounds an event, it is closely related to the meaning of the event. According to Hall, cultures are classified into high-context and low-context based on the degree to which messages in communication come from the settings or from the words being exchanged. The following continuum of levels of context in various cultures was determined in 1986 by Copeland & L. Griggs.

Lower Context Culture

German-Swiss

German

Scandinavian

American

English Canadian

French Canadian

French

Italian

Spanish

Mexican

Greek

Arab

Chinese

Japanese

Higher Context Culture

High-context communication always occurs among in-groups, for they share similar tradition, experiences and information networks. So in a high-context culture, many messages being exchanged during communication do not have to be conveyed through words, they may be conveyed through gestures, silence and even space. Employees from high-context cultures like China and France may adapt to their good friends, families and also to close colleagues (in-group members). They communicate with them intensively and exchange specific and detailed information about many different topics.

Low-context cultures, such as Germany or the United States make much less extensive use of such similar experiences and expectations to communicate, since the members have less common experiences. Much more is explained through words, instead of the context.

Within communication, members of low-context culture exchange information just to the necessary extent so that work can be done and they don't discuss or exchange information constantly in their work environment and colleagues.

High-context often has something to do with collectivistic culture. So in high-context culture, members first need to build up an interpersonal relationship. They place great importance on circumstance, etiquette, the relative status of the participants in a communication and the manner of message's delivery. They tend to be reserved when their own opinions are needed. In case of a meeting, members of high-context culture would not interact and express their disagreement or reservations. They think circumstances and relationships are as important as work, so they would comment only in a more private or appropriate occasion.

In contrast, low-context cultures are more individualistic. Members (the Americans or the Germans) may argue about each other's opinion within the decision-making process and take discussions in their own hands to come to an agreement. Within this process members of low-context tend to be precise and provide just the required information.

Tasks:

1. What is meant by the sentence "Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism"?
2. Find out the evidence that culture is shared across societies. And discuss the advantages and disadvantages of cultural exchange.
3. Give some examples to explain "proverbs reflect the value and worldview of a culture".
4. Give examples to illustrate the changes Chinese cultural patterns have experienced since the early 20th century.
5. Suppose you are working in an American company, what do you, as a Chinese, have to do to adapt to the environment?
6. Find out some evidence to prove that Chinese culture belongs to high-context culture.

Chapter 2 Intercultural Communication

As we know from Chapter 1, there are many different cultural groups in the world. And much difference exists in terms of value tendencies and communication styles. However, with the development of global economy, the world has become a place where all the people get much more interconnected than ever before. Sometimes we may find ourselves in a situation where you have to interact with those whose backgrounds, worldviews and even lifestyles are totally different from ours. In such a circumstance, what we need is a command of the knowledge of intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication, as is also referred to as cross-cultural communication, is a field of study that looks at how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. In another sense, intercultural communication also studies the situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact.

Intercultural communication is very challenging, so in this chapter what we are going to do is: to recognize the problems or the barriers that hamper intercultural communication; and to learn how to improve our intercultural communication competence.

1. Barriers in Intercultural Communication

In the process of intercultural communication, we might encounter some of the following problems.

1.1 Seeking Similarity

Birds of a feather flock together. This means that most people like to be around those who have similar values, habits and lifestyles. We may feel uncomfortable when facing stranger, while familiarity can give us a sense of security. Seeking similarity is understandable, but problems arise when people only interact with those who have common backgrounds and exclude those that are different. Examples of this tendency can be found in the fact that some people prefer their own kind and shut the door on the unfamiliar, and that some hold hostility towards people from another culture.

1.2 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to believe that one's own race or ethnic group is the most important and that some or all aspects of its culture are superior to those of other groups. Most people have the notion that their own values and practices are better than those of others. For example, members of one culture may think the eating of animals (dogs or cats) as barbarous and abnormal; some view the men wearing robes and having four wives as unbearable.

As a major barrier to intercultural communication, ethnocentrism may take one form or another in intercultural contacts. The typical ethnocentric attitudes are: most other cultures are backward compared with my culture; my culture should be the sole model for other cultures; most people from other cultures just don't know what's good for them; people in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere. Therefore, ethnocentrists would not trust and cooperate with people who are different.

People having the tendency of ethnocentrism tend to judge other people habitually and unconsciously by using their own customs as the standards. Because of its habitual nature, ethnocentrism is hard to overcome and often causes miscommunication in intercultural contacts. Moreover, it tends to result in prejudice and discrimination.

1.3 Stereotyping

According to Samovar and Porter (2004), stereotyping is a complex form of categorization that mentally organizes your experiences and guides your behavior toward a particular group of people. Stereotyping is as old as human culture itself, and can be found in nearly every intercultural situation.

One reason people stereotype is that it is too difficult to take in all of the complexities of other people. Even though stereotyping is inaccurate, it is efficient. Human beings have the psychological need to label or categorize. The world is too big and too complex for us to know, so we have to classify and simplify what we encounter into categories.

Childhood influences are some of the most complex and influential factors in developing stereotypes. Though they can be absorbed at any age, stereotypes are usually acquired in early childhood under the influence of parents, teachers, peers, and the media. Once a stereotype is learned, it often becomes ever-lasting.