



# **Intercultural Communication:** **A Contrastive English-Chinese Perspective**

## 英汉对比视角下的 **跨文化交际研究**



黄慧敏 著



湖南师范大学出版社

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## Preface

Writing a book often consumes much of one's time and energy, just like digging a tunnel. At first, everything seemed to be work, sweat and darkness. I had no idea where I was going and when I would reach the light or even if I would. In a period of time, I hesitated and even stopped it. After a struggle within myself, I restarted it again and persisted, then I saw a chink of light and finally all the sunlight poured in. And here it comes.

The book is intended for graduate students and other learners who show a great interest in language, culture and intercultural communication. It covers ten chapters altogether and involves: 1) an elaboration of how three new motivations and China's rise on the world stage speed intercultural communication today; 2) an interpretation of how culture and communication are related to each other, and what are their respective characteristics and modals, and what are intercultural communication and their forms; 3) a comparison between Chinese and American cultures from three perspectives of different cultural patterns, value dimensions and the deep structure of culture; 4) a description of language characteristics, function, and its relationship with culture, and an explanation of translation as a culture and language

transference and as an equivalence-seeking in different cultures or languages; 5) a discussion of rhetoric functions as thinking modes to reflect cultures and as an effective means to convey the intention or thought of speakers in intercultural communication; 6) a case analysis of intercultural communication in education and medical treatment between Xiang and Ya for more than a hundred years; 7) a presentation of some examples selected from graduates to discuss and comment on the Chinese Movie *Guasha* in the perspective of intercultural communication as an ending of the book.

What is more, there are two things worth mentioning. First, although the subtitle is named as a contrastive Chinese-English perspective, the focus is mainly put on that between the Chinese and American cultures. Second, those cases or examples applied in the book to support the ideas of the author only state a fact and are not intended for generalizing the whole from a single point.

*Huimin Huang*  
Changsha, Hunan  
November 2013

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The completion of a book always comes from much encouragement and support. So did mine. They are worth mentioning and remembering.

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Above all, I would like to appreciate both my daughter and husband very much. Without their generous help and persistent encouragement, the completion of my book is unthinkable.

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# Introduction

As intercultural and interpersonal contacts become more and more global, greater numbers of people are conducting social, commercial and political activities across national and cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication appears increasingly global where an unsettled issue in one place often triggers disputes in other places. On one hand, culture colors people's sense of identity and perceptions, as people's thought patterns, perceptions and behaviors can be often traced back to their cultural influences. On the other hand, cultural misunderstanding is costly and consequences can be serious if cultural differences are not well dealt with. Therefore, in every corner of the world today, the significance of intercultural communication and researches about how to solve cultural problems and avoid cultural clashes stand out in world affairs as ever before.

The history of intercultural communication can take us back thousands of years when man came into being and began his primitive labor. But as an issue of academic research, it is very recent. Not until the 1950s, did some famous scholars in the world begin to focus their study on intercultural communication. Edward Hall's *The Silent Language* (1959) was considered a cornerstone in this field. For the first time, from his anthropologist perspective, he had delved into the relationship between culture and language as well as non-verbal communication, and revealed the vitally important role of silent language in human communication. Then in 1980, Hofstede G. published *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*, marking an important moment in cross-cultural studies and combined the statistical analysis research from the survey with his personal experiences. Especially his cultural dimension theory first proposed four dimensions along with cultural values, which described the effects of a society's culture on the values of its

members, and how these values were related to behavior using a structure derived from factor analysis. Then more scholars followed suit like Samovar LA, et al. (1998/2000) who gave us an excellent overview of the issues involved in intercultural communication. Its description of the deep structure of culture, the role of co-culture and cultural identity, and especially of similarities in world views and ethical standards still guide people to make some new contributions to the current findings of intercultural communication.

In China, with the great improvement of our economy and national power in the world, the research into intercultural communication more appears to brook no delay. Since the 1980s, there have emerged many famous scholars in this field, like Deng Yanchang & Liu Ruqing (1989), Jia Yuxin (1997), Hu Wenzhong (1999), Xu Lisheng (2004), Shi Dingle and Peng Chunping (2004), Liu Fengxia (2005) and so on. They filled a gap in the research of the subject and helped to make it a discipline in China. Jia Yuxin (1997) described intercultural communication from the perspectives of concepts, calculation, contexts, pragmatics and discourses. And Xu Lisheng (2004) focuses on cultural differences, verbal and nonverbal communication, especially on intercultural perception, understanding and adaptation. Their theoretical writings on multiculturalism or intercultural communication also examined real-life situations and offered some suggestions for the solution to cultural issues arisen in intercultural communication in China.

Encouraged by the situation, based on years of teaching experience in intercultural communication and on some personal experiences as both in Yale and in Southern Utah University in America, the author began to explore intercultural communication in a contrastive perspective of Chinese and English from cultural values, thinking modes and so on. The author holds that in the activities of intercultural communication, people would like to use their own cultural stereotypes and standards to judge behaviors or actions of other people from different cultures. And this easily produces some misunderstanding and even clashes or leads to the failure of intercultural communication. A quick survey of the political disputes or religious clashes in the world today is almost all rooted in cultural sources.

On the basis of this fact, the book attempts to seek for some effective solutions to those often-seen but easily-neglected misunderstanding or issues of the deep cultural structures in intercultural communication. And the book will

be divided into ten chapters and its focuses are primarily on: 1) expounding how three new motivations and China's rise on the world stage speed intercultural communication; 2) making a practical analysis of different characteristics of communication and culture between Chinese and American cultures in a dynamic process, and further a contrastive study of the deep structure of culture from their respective history, religion, worldview and family; 3) putting translation into intercultural communication, as a process of culture and language transference and as an equivalently-seeking among different languages or cultures to make people aware of its role in intercultural communication; 4) leading rhetoric devices and their functions to the discussion, for the first time, of intercultural communication, as a thinking mode to mirror and convey diverse cultures and as an effective approach to increasing mutual understanding in intercultural communication; 5) analyzing a successful case of intercultural communication between Xiang (the short name of Hunan) and Ya (the ancient name of Yale in the US) in the past 100 years, as an exploration of some attitudes badly required intercultural communication; 6) displaying some samples taken from a few graduates to comment on the Chinese movie *Guasha* which reflects sharp clashes of intercultural communication between China and America to raise people's awareness of intercultural communication.

All the above discussion aims at encouraging people to flexibly shift their cultural perspectives, to accept differences and appreciate similarities, to avoid misunderstanding information and implications of different cultures and to promote the efficiency of intercultural communication. The author believes that people from different cultural backgrounds can understand each other fully and improve intercultural communication in a smooth and healthy way if they are willing to stand in the shoes of other cultures. After all, in the only world we are staying, seeking untiringly for how to live in harmony with each other and nature, how to fast develop global economy, education and science and how to maintain the world's peace is the most active and significant pursue of human beings. And only through mutual understanding, sincere dialogues and effective intercultural communication with an attitude of accepting differences and appreciating similarities via laying aside disputes, shall we keep a long-term peace and progress in the world.

# Chapter 1

## Great Changes in Intercultural Communication

With the hyper-growth of economy, science, education, energy resources and public affairs in the world, space seems to be much shrunk and time shortened, and the psychological distance among people is gradually disappearing. Human communication becomes more and more frequent, while studies of intercultural communication appear to be in more need to meet the situation. Its importance and significance becomes greater than ever before.

### 1.1 The Importance of Intercultural Communication

Before everything begins, we need to think a question: "What is intercultural communication concerned with and why is intercultural communication important?" In effect, the importance of intercultural communication is more and more apparent with the rapid development of world's economy and especially with the upgrade of China's national power on all sides. Therefore, instead of stating many reasons about its importance, we would like first to make an analysis of a few examples with some problems about intercultural communication, so as to make its importance more highlighted.

#### **Why is intercultural communication important?**

First, let's discuss the following questions and make choices:

- 1) When responding to a praise, American people would say:
  - A. "You praise me too much."
  - B. "No, no... That is too much for me."
  - C. "It's very kind of you to say so."
  - D. "Thank you!"

- 2) A foreign visitor stops you in the corridor to ask for the way. What is your most likely reply to the visitor's "Excuse me"?
- A. "What is the matter?"      B. "Yes?"  
C. "That's all right."      D. "What do you want?"
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ may function as an appropriate reply to an invitation.
- A. "Thank you very much. I'll come if I am free then."  
B. "Thank you very much. But I can't accept your invitation."  
C. "That would be very nice. Thank you!"  
D. "Thank you, I'll try to come."
- 4) If you want to get to know some foreign guests or greet someone at a company's annual party, you should say: \_\_\_\_\_
- A. "Hi, I am x x x."  
B. "Hi, I'd like to meet you."  
C. "Hi, may I know your name, please?"  
D. "Hi, may I introduce myself to you?"

The above questions look very easy to answer, but in fact some mistakes are also easily made if we answer those questions without thinking much or just by judging from our own standards of cultural habits. Let's make a comparison between English reference responses and Chinese ones.

#### **Suggested English Responses**

1. C. "It's very kind of you to say so."
2. D. "Thank you!"
3. B. "Yes?"
4. C. "That would be very nice. Thank you"
4. A. "Hi, I am ×××."

#### **Compared with Chinese responses:**

1. A. 过奖了。  
B. 别这样说, 您太抬举我了。
2. A. 有什么事吗?
3. All are possible.
4. C. Hi, may I know your name, please? (您好, 请问贵姓?)

With the contrast above, you may take notice of some differences between Chinese and English thought patterns and get to agree that there is something that people need to think. And the "something" is just what intercultural com-

munication is concerned. Intercultural communication, as its name implies, is concerned with communication among people from different cultural backgrounds. To make it more sure, some more cases are offered here to figure out sources of why we make such mistakes or why we have sometimes misunderstandings in intercultural communication, thus helping us understand better the importance of intercultural communication.

### Case 1:

#### On a plane

“Two men met on a plane from Tokyo to HK. Chu Hon-fai is a HK exporter who is returning from a business trip to Japan. Andrew Richardson is an American buyer on his first business trip to HK. It is a convenient meeting for them because Mr. Chu’s company sells some of the products Mr. Richardson has come to HK to buy. After a bit of conversation they introduce themselves to each other.

*Mr. Richardson:* By the way, I’m Andrew Richardson. My friends call me Andy. This is my business card.

*Mr. Chu:* I’m David Chu. I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Richardson. This is my card.

*Mr. Richardson:* No, no. Call me Andy. I think we’ll be doing a lot business together.

*Mr. Chu:* Yes, I hope so.

*Mr. Richardson:* (reading MR Chu’s card): ‘Chu Hon-fai’  
Hon-fai, I’ll give you a call tomorrow as soon as I get settled at my hotel.

*Mr. Chu:* (smiling) Yes. I’ll expect your call.”<sup>①</sup>

The case is simple enough and seems nothing wrong. Yet, there is something wrong or confused indeed. Why?

#### An psychological analysis on both parties of Mr. Richardson and Mr. Chu:

First, immediately after Mr. Richardson introduces himself, he said “my friends call me Andy” with the implication that Mr. Chu is welcome to call

① Scollon R & Scollon S W. Intercultural communication: A discourse approach [M]. Beijing: Beijing Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000:122.



him Andy, as there is a tendency in American business circles to prefer close, friendly, egalitarian relationships in business engagements. Mr. Richardson, as a businessman, knows well their system of *symmetrical solidarity*, which has its source in the Utilitarian discourse system in America. In it people often prefer to given name in business encounters to show they are equal to each other, while Mr. Chu as a businessman in Hong Kong influenced by Chinese Culture, prefers an initial business relationship of *symmetrical deference*. He would feel more comfortable if they call each other Mr. so and so. Moreover he had been at a school in North America and learned that Americans feel awkward in a stable relationship of symmetrical deference. Therefore he chose David for use in case there is such a situation. That is why he introduced himself as David Chu. But Mr. Richardson runs to another way.

**The reasons for the confusion of both parties in Case 1:**

For Mr. Chu, the given name is rarely used by anyone, except those people inside the family or very close friends in China.

For Mr. Richardson, he does not know that the Chinese have a rather complex structure of names, such as an intimate name, family baby names, and even some Western names, each of which is used just by the people with whom he has a certain relationship. Therefore, when Mr. Chu hears himself called Hon-fai by a stranger at the first meeting, he felt quite uncomfortable and awkward. Therefore, he smiled to cover his embarrassment, which we call “nervous laughter”.

**Two issues of intercultural communication revealed in the short dialogue:**

One is the basic question of culture difference, and the other is the problem that arises when people try to deal with cultural difference. In this case, when Mr. Richardson made an attempt at keeping cultural sensitivity, he, at the same time, has actually made the situation worse than that when he had just used the adopted Western name, David.

In the course of intercultural communication, both participants have a strong desire for a success in the communication. But the wish and reality is far from each other sometimes in fact. The intercultural meetings as mentioned above are frequently apt to give rise to some confusion or even hostility.