

Finding the Common Tunes of International Relations

# Cultural Differences Comparative Studies

For Facilitating International Cooperation

By Dr. Xu Qinhua

○ 文化差异比较研究：●……

为促进国际合作

许勤华 著



中国出版集团



世界图书出版公司

# 文化差异比较研究： 为促进国际合作

**CULTURAL DIFFERENCES COMPARATIVE STUDIES  
FOR  
FACILITATING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

许勤华 著

中国出版集团  
世界图书出版公司  
广州·上海·西安·北京

## 图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

文化差异比较研究：为促进国际合作：英文 / 许勤华著. — 广州：世界图书出版广东有限公司，2012.5

ISBN 978-7-5100-4760-2

I. ①文… II. ①许… III. ①东西文化—对比研究—英文  
IV. ①G04

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2012) 第 106821 号

## 文化差异比较研究：为促进国际合作

---

责任编辑 孔令钢

出版发行 世界图书出版广东有限公司

地 址 广州市新港西路大江冲 25 号

[http:// www.gdst.com.cn](http://www.gdst.com.cn)

印 刷 广州市快美印务有限公司

规 格 880mm×1230mm 1/32

印 张 4

字 数 60 千

版 次 2013 年 5 月第 2 版 2013 年 5 月第 2 次印刷

ISBN 978-7-5100-4760-2/G·1056

定 价 20.00 元

---

版权所有，翻印必究

## 项目声明

此书为教育部人文社会科学研究青年基金项目《低碳时代发展清洁能源国际比较研究——兼论中国清洁能源国际合作战略》(项目批准号:10YJCGJW016)和中国人民大学科学研究基金项目《中国能源国际合作的理论和实践》(中央高校基本科研业务费专项资金资助,项目批准号:10XN1005)阶段性成果。

**The book is the interim achievement for International Comparative Research on the Development of Clean Energy in Low-carbon Era—China's International Cooperation Strategy for Clean Energy, one of the Youth Fund Projects affiliated to the Humanities and Social Sciences Research and Planning Programs of Ministry of Education (Grant No. 10YJCGJW016), and The Theory and Practice for the International Cooperation of China's Energy, one of the Scientific Research Fund Projects of Renmin University of China (Grant No. 10XN1005).**

# ABSTRACT

In this book, the author tries to explain cultural differences in various perspectives and to equip the readers with the knowledge on how to cope well with the cultural differences.

The rapid technological development in the last few decades has changed our world to a global village in which interaction among people of different cultural background is more and more common. How to equip ourselves to understand more about different cultures is particularly important for us to be successful in the international arena. The author makes use of many interesting real life examples as well as useful references from various sources to explain clearly the meaning of culture, and illustrate various elements of culture such as races and languages, religion and spiritual traditions, political belief, values, attitudes and behaviors, customs and traditions, etc., and then explains in details some cultural differences. Examples in many important areas, such as names, addressing, greetings, colours, dressing, consumption of foods and beverage, punctuality, touch, hand gestures, etc. are given to demonstrate the cultural differences. The readers can obtain very useful information from the list of these examples to prevent themselves from falling into embarrassments arising from cultural differences. In the last few chapters, the author offers useful tips to guide the readers on the means to appreciate the cultural differences and how to survive in a multicultural environment. The author also explains the three phases of cultural shock and shows the readers the right path to go through successfully phase by phase the cultural shock journey.

The book is particularly useful to foreigners who wish to prepare

**themselves to start settling in a new environment with a culture different from their owns. Since the author has vast experience in both Western and Asian cultures, she is able to quote many informative and interesting examples which make the book very practical in application.**

## 内容概要

这本书的作者试图从各种不同角度去解释文化差异，并使读者具备应付文化差异的各种能力和知识。

在过去几十年，迅速的科技发展把我们的世界变成了地球村，不同文化背景的人交流互动越来越常见。如何装备自己，使自己更好地了解不同的文化显得尤其重要，这可使我们在国际舞台上获得成功。作者使用很多有趣的、真实的、源于生活的例子，同时引用各种具有实用价值的文献清楚地解释文化的意义，并举例说明各种文化元素，如种族和语言、宗教和精神传统、政治信仰、价值观、态度和行为、民俗和传统等，详细解释一些文化差异。读者可以从许多重要领域的事例中获得非常有用的信息，如名称、地址、问候、颜色、穿着、食品、饮料、守时、触摸、手势等，防止自己落入由文化差异造成的尴尬情景中。在最后的几章，作者提供了实用小贴士指导读者欣赏文化差异，以及如何在一个多元文化的环境中获得生存的手段。作者还阐述了大部分人在进入陌生文化时可能遭遇的三个阶段的文化冲击，并告诉读者克服这些文化冲击的正确路径。

因为作者既熟悉西方文化又熟悉亚洲文化，能够列举许多内容丰富有趣的例子，使这本书非常具有实用价值。所以对于准备定居于不同于自己文化的新环境中的外国人特别有帮助。

# CONTENTS

Prologue Survival of the Fittest.....	1
Chapter I What is Culture? .....	3
Chapter II Elements of Culture.....	7
Chapter III Distinctive Cultural Differences.....	19
Chapter IV Appreciating Cultural Differences.....	30
Chapter V Survival in a Multicultural Environment.....	35
Epilogue.....	49
Appendices.....	50
References.....	115



# PROLOGUE

## Survival of the Fittest

Since China's reform and opening-up some 30 years ago, many overseas companies have entered into Chinese market to look for business and investment opportunities. When the Chinese market has been growing in its importance, more and more overseas companies set up their regional offices in China and send their employees, the expatriates, to stay and live in China. The interaction and cultural exchanges between foreigners and Chinese have then been greatly increasing.

The growth in interaction and cultural exchanges further increases because of a more recent outward movement of Chinese companies and Chinese people to overseas countries for the same purposes.

The differences in culture, if not handled carefully, may lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and even possible disasters. It is particularly important for those people, who have plans or intentions to move to a foreign country, either because of emigration or as expatriates, to understand the importance of differences in culture and the possible means to cope with the differences.

Based on my own academic exposure and experience, I would like to share with the readers my thought on Cultural Differences. I hope the readers will find the sharing useful for them to understand more about cultural differences, and can help those people who need to handle cultural differences more easily to tackle with the challenges.

**Under the impact of globalization, international cooperation becomes more frequent nowadays. To certain extent, sometimes cultural differences among nations have created barriers which cause obstruction to the smooth operation of international cooperation. The objective of this book is to assist in overcoming the barriers arising from cultural differences, so that the ultimate goal of international cooperation can be achieved more easily and effectively, no matter the cooperation is among nations, enterprises, international organizations or just among peoples.**

# CHAPTER I

## What is Culture?

*“Every man’s ability may be strengthened or increased by culture.”*

John Abbott (1821-1893) Canadian lawyer and statesman

It is now quite a common feeling that the world is getting smaller. It is certainly not because the earth that we all live in is becoming in physical size. We feel that countries are getting closer to each other because the technological development in ICT (information and communication technology) allows us to see and hear other people in a much more easy and speedy manner than before. At the same time, the advancement in transportation modes nowadays facilitates us to travel in a much cost effective way so that it is now much more common and affordable for people to travel abroad. We are now living in a global village. Simply by a touch of a keyboard, we can communicate with anyone anywhere in the world. Interaction with foreigners is more common and frequent, no matter it may only be by means of virtual contact through ICT or it is a real physical contact through your participation to an international conference. It is perhaps now simply inevitable for the people to have interaction with foreigners if they are living in an international city, or they are working in an organizations having business with overseas companies.

As we are all aware, people from different countries have their own traditions, beliefs, and behaviours, which form parts of the culture

of the countries. In order to be successful in the global arena, one has to understand and cope well with different cultures.

So, what then is Culture?

Culture is a word which we often hear, perhaps almost every day of our lives, for example, the culture of a country, a race, a tribe, and an organization. We are also made aware of cultural events such as exhibitions, performances, artifacts, etc.

## **Definitions**

What then does the Culture mean? What is its definition?

**According to the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA):**

*“Culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group.”*

**There are other definitions as well:**

*“Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not*

*material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways. ”*

Banks J.A., Banks & McGee C.A. (1989) Multicultural education  
Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

*“Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. ”*

Hofstede G. (1984). National cultures and corporate cultures in  
L.A. Samovar & R.E. Porter (Eds.) Communication between Cultures  
Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

*“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action. ”*

Kroeber A.L. & Kluckhohn C. (1952) Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions. Harvard University Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology Papers 47

**The above are just but a few of the numerous definitions about culture that you may find in textbooks, treatises, research reports, etc. However, the most comprehensive definition of culture may come from Roshan Cultural Heritage Foundation, Honolulu, Hawaii, United States. The full text of the definition which it uses to define culture is given in Appendix I.**

**In simple terms, Roshan Cultural Heritage considered Culture refers to the ways of life such as Language, Arts & Science, Thought, Spirituality, Social Activity, Interaction, etc.**

**We can infer from the above definitions that:**

**1. Culture can be learned, shared and passed from one generation to the next.**

**2. Culture can be taught by parents to children, acquired through social organizations, special interest groups, the government, schools, and churches.**

**3. Culture is multidimensional, consisting of a number of interdependent common elements.**

**In the following chapters, we shall look at various elements of culture, cultural differences and how to cope with the differences in culture so as to achieve one's goals in the international arena.**

# CHAPTER II

## Elements of Culture

*Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.*

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

From the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute's Definition of Culture, we can understand that Culture is made up of many elements. In this Chapter, we shall attempt to discuss some of the elements one by one.

### **Race and Language**

From my research, I found that there are about 1,300 different ethnic groups, each having their own customs, traditions and taboos.

There are 500 different languages / dialects in the world.

In China alone, there are 56 different ethnic groups including the Hans, and each has its own language and/or dialect. Hans from different regions in China speak in different dialects as well. The marvelous phenomenon is that when the words are expressed in written forms, all ethnic groups in China write the same way, and they understand each other. Not all countries have such a phenomenon .

To enable the population of their countries to understand each other, most countries have official languages, some have only one

official language, but it is also not uncommon to have more than one. Official languages tend to be the language of the dominant ethnic group in most countries. However, where the ethnic composition is spread evenly, so to speak, there may be more than one official language to appease the ethnic groups and to avoid possible ethnic tension. There are about 20 countries that have more than one language as their national/official languages. India ranks the top in terms of its number of official languages, 16 altogether, as far as I understand.

In an article from St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland, Ohio, USA, it cited articles by The Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL) Ethnologue Survey, Dr. Bernard Comrie's article for the Encarta Encyclopedia (1998), and George Weber's article "Top Languages: The World's 10 Most Influential Languages" in Language Today (Vol. 2, Dec 1997). "After weighing six factors (number of primary speakers, number of secondary speakers, number and population of countries where used, number of major fields using the language internationally, economic power of countries using the languages, and socio—literary prestige), Weber compiled the following list of the world's ten most influential languages(number of points given in parentheses):

- 1.English (37)
- 2.French (23)
- 3.Spanish (20)
- 4.Russian (16)
- 5.Arabic (14)
- 6.Chinese (13)
- 7.German (12)



8. Japanese (10)

9. Portuguese (10)

10. Hindi/Urdu (9) ”

A common language used in different countries and/or regions of a particular country can have different meanings and subject to different interpretations.

There was a case about a lady of Chinese descent from a Southeast Asian country, which may well illustrate the issue. The case started when the lady landed in Shanghai’s Pudong International Airport. Using English as her mother tongue, the lady only has a very limited knowledge about Chinese language. She hailed a taxi and tried to tell the driver in English her destination. The driver could not understand, and in her frustration, she tried to liken their communication difficulty to a situation that a chicken talked to a duck. She then told the driver in her limited Chinese, “I am a chicken and you are a duck...” The driver immediately told her to get off his car to take another taxi. In Chinese, to describe a female as a “chicken” means that she belongs to the world’s oldest profession, i.e. prostitute. Similarly, saying a male being a duck means that he is of the same profession.

Non-verbal language, also known as body language, is also important in the study of the language element of culture. This branch of the communicative action is manifested in time, space, material possessions, friendship gestures and business negotiations.

## **Religion and Spiritual Traditions**

The number of Religions and Spiritual Traditions, with its splinter groups, is just countless.

L. D. Howe in his article on Religion in Society described the relationship between Religion and Culture as: