

# SUBJECTIVE INTERCULTURAL VARIATIONS AMONG CHINESE NEGOTIATORS

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**Abstract:** Chinese negotiators are known to have a negotiation emphasis that differs from their Western counterparts, especially in issues of face and conflict. This research examines how negotiation tactics changes when Chinese negotiators are faced with counterparts from near and distant cultures. An online conjoint simulation drew 351 respondents in Taiwan to test subjective perceptions of counterparts from the USA and Japan. Chinese respondents exhibited increased cultural accommodation when the counterpart's culture was more distant—paying more attention to sacrificing self-interest and saving face for the other side. Saving face, ignoring conflict, and domination tactics were consistently valued, irrelevant of culture. Masculinity among Chinese respondents was exhibited in a preference for integration with male counterparts, especially for Chinese male negotiators. Results indicate practical considerations when preparing for negotiation with a Chinese counterpart by considering inconsistencies in preferences while also considering consistent values.

## CHINESE NEGOTIATORS' SUBJECTIVE VARIATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS

When Mr. Chen meets Mr. Yang in Shanghai, both may expect common ground for building their negotiation. Even though one negotiator is from Beijing and the other from Taipei, they share a culture. What will be the result when Mr. Yang meets with Mr. Smith, or Mr. Kazuo, or Ms. Mariko? Confucian values are the underpinnings of Chinese social relationships (Lo and Otis, 2003). Chinese negotiators inherit much from their Confucian roots (Deverge, 1986, Yan and Sorenson, 2004). Modern Chinese values, however, are fluid, adjusting to circumstance. The subjectively assumed cultural values of a negotiator's counterpart may cause such adjustments. Confucian principles of mutual support, co-existence, and cooperation help maintain relationships of trust that are a vital dynamic within the social collective (Cha, 2003, Chow and Ng, 2004). What happens when the negotiation counterpart does to hold those same values or even belong to the same collective?

A Chinese negotiator may identify more strongly with his or her own Confucian values when facing a counterpart whose own culture shares these assumptions, such as the case of Mr. Kazuo. Although Japanese culture differs from Chinese culture, assumptions about commonality may reinforce a belief of belonging to an ingroup: affirmation. An assumed larger cultural distance (Mr. Smith) actually encourages a shift towards the out-group position: accommodation (Yang and Bond, 1980, Bond, 1983, Bond and Hwang, 1986, Ng et al., 1982, Miles, 2003). These differential shifts in cultural value emphasis can impact a cross cultural negotiation (Stewart et al., 1999). Specifically, Chinese expectations of relationships within the negotiation context will change, dependent on the

perceived cultural values of the negotiator’s counterpart (Thompson and Hastie, 1990). The research question guiding this experiment asks what the nature of that shift is and what parts of the negotiation are most influenced?

Early in a negotiation, perceptions play an important role in assumptions of social interactions. This influences a negotiation’s emphasis on integration (win/win) or distribution (win/lose) (Watson and McKersie, 1965, Pruitt and Rubin, 1986). Collectivists will tend to seek interpersonal relationships that encourage an integrative approach (Ma et al., 2002). Matsudaira (2003) emphasized the underlying similarities that exist between Chinese and Japanese society in their collectivist values. In contrast, American culture is described as highly individualistic. Chinese and American values often are at odds, as in Hofstede’s topography of four cultural dimensions (not including the Confucian specific Long-Term Orientation). For example, the two cultures consistently appear in opposite quadrants (see Table 1) in Hofstede’s cluster analysis results.

|        | Power distance & individualism         | Power distance & masculinity       | Masculinity & individualism | Masculinity & uncertainty avoidance        | Uncertainty avoidance & individualism         | Power distance & uncertainty avoidance                |
|--------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| U.S.A. | Small power distance/<br>Individualist | Small power distance/<br>Masculine | Individualist/<br>Masculine | Weak uncertainty avoidance/<br>Masculine   | Weak uncertainty avoidance/<br>Individualist  | Small power distance/<br>Weak uncertainty avoidance   |
| Taiwan | Large power distance/<br>Collectivist  | Large power distance/<br>Feminine  | Collectivist/<br>Feminine   | Strong uncertainty avoidance/<br>Feminine  | Strong uncertainty avoidance/<br>Collectivist | Large power distance/<br>Strong uncertainty avoidance |
| Japan  | Large power distance/<br>Collectivist  | Large power distance/<br>Masculine | Collectivist/<br>Masculine  | Strong uncertainty avoidance/<br>Masculine | Strong uncertainty avoidance/<br>Collectivist | Large power distance/<br>Strong uncertainty avoidance |

Table 1. Cultural dimensions contrasted between American and Chinese cultures (Hofstede 2005)

Chinese values and Japanese values also differ, only occurring in the same cluster once, but falling in the same quadrants three times and sharing at least one quadrant three times. These three nationalities were selected for testing because all three cultures are classified within Hofstede’s results as generally not in the same cluster—making them all somewhat different from each other. Additionally, there is a generally accepted belief in Taiwan of a likeness between Japanese and Chinese values. This supplies a sample frame that includes differences and similarities. A common emphasis on face considerations in conflict situations does exist between Chinese and Japanese cultures as well as a commonality of Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian traditions (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey, 2003). For these reasons, Japanese and Chinese negotiator’s cultural and ethnic values would be perceived by Chinese respondents as more closely aligned than those of American negotiators, triggering affirmation in the first case and accommodation in the second.

**Proposition 1: Chinese respondents will show cross-cultural accommodation to American negotiators.**

**Proposition 2: Chinese respondents will show the same amount of ethnic affirmation to Japanese and Chinese negotiators.**

Autonomy expectations are closely related to the independence or interdependence of a culture (Hofstede, 1980, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). Traditional Confucian societies tend to accept that high status individuals are usually afforded more power, rights, and respect (Leung, 1996, Tinsley, 1997). This emphasis on status and the distribution of power is known as Power Distance (PDI) (Hofstede, 1980), leading to our next proposition:

**Proposition 3: Chinese respondents will show a higher tendency towards integrating with high status negotiators than low status negotiators.**

Gender can play a role in negotiation, especially in increasingly masculine cultures (Salacuse, 1998, Stuhlmacher and Walters, 1999). Masculinity (MAS) (Hofstede, 1998) is defined as the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control and power, with Japanese rating highest on Hofstede’s MAS scale. While both genders will tend to be more masculine oriented in a high MAS culture, an interesting side effect is the gap between the genders is larger in high MAS cultures than low MAS cultures. In a high MAS culture, males will be more sensitive to a subjective difference between male and female counterparts. According to Hofstede’s data, Chinese culture ranks more feminine than both the extreme Japanese and the moderately masculine U.S.A. culture. Thus, a Chinese negotiator’s negotiation tactics (whether male or female) should not be different when faced with a male or female counterpart, leading to our next two propositions:

**Proposition 4: Chinese male respondents will show an equal tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with men and women.**

**Proposition 5: Chinese female respondents will show an equal tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with men and women.**

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) specifically addresses Confucian values and has been increasingly included in Hofstede’s (2005) dimensions. The highest ranking countries of this dimension were China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, in that order. The U.S.A. occupies the 18<sup>th</sup> place on Hofstede’s LTO index out of the twenty-three countries surveyed. This leads to our last proposition:

**Proposition 6: Chinese respondents will show a stronger tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with a negotiator who shows a higher Long-Term Orientation.**

**METHODOLOGY**

To investigate our research propositions, we adopted the constructs of self-face and other-face in Chinese negotiation, as elaborated by (Ting-Toomey, 1998). Conjoint analysis was employed so that each variable could be ranked based on its level of influence within a simulated negotiation. An additional advantage of conjoint is the capability to combine unrelated and non-continuous variables. The variables under study and their manipulations have an uncertain relationship. The focus of this study is on the subjective judgment of Chinese respondents only. We did not address the reality or absolute values of any of the variables. The attributes, of PDI, MAS, and LTO were each broken down into two distinct levels, while nationality was represented by three levels. Pre-testing on the presentation of the attribute levels was undertaken with 22 MBA students in Taiwan, including actual scenario ratings in order to confirm the manipulations of attribute levels. Adjustments were made based on pre-testing until levels displayed the expected responses. Table 2 shows the levels of each independent variable.

| Attribute                   | Attribute levels   |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Power Distance (PDI)        | Manager (high)<br>Employee (low)                         |
| Masculinity (MAS)           | Male (high)<br>Female (low)                              |
| Long-Term Orientation (LTO) | Co-operative offer (high)<br>Mistrusting offer (low)     |
| Culture                     | American (distant)<br>Japanese (close)<br>Chinese (same) |

Table 2. Independent attribute levels

The maximum number of attribute combinations totaled 24 (2 x 2 x 2 x 3), which was reduced to eight cases with an orthogonal design. Two additional holdout cases were included for reliability checking—totaling ten negotiation scenarios. Six dependent questions were derived from Ting-Toomey’s (1998) Face Negotiation Theory (see Table 3) with responses ranging between Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree on a six point Likert scale, avoiding a middle response we and others have found Chinese respondents tend toward (Lee et al., 2002).

| Dependent variable     | Survey question  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Interdependent face | I am willing to sacrifice my self-interest for the benefits of our relationship. |
| 2. Other-face          | I am concerned with helping the other person to maintain his/her credibility.    |
| 3. Self-face           | I am concerned with protecting my self-image.                                    |
| 4. Avoiding            | I will try to ignore conflict and behave as if nothing has happened.             |
| 5. Dominating          | I will dominate the argument until the other person understands my position.     |
| 6. Integrating         | I will give and take so that a compromise can be made.                           |

Table 3. Dependent variables and survey questions

Respondents were told they were entering a described negotiation process. The computer-based survey then generated the specifics of the negotiation (manipulating the attribute levels), presenting one negotiation case at a time with the dependent variables’ questions. Respondents entered values with a mouse. In order to emphasize the negotiation counterpart’s role, the screen presented a

picture of the negotiator gender (MAS), closing c presented (with the exce Asian features, and half recognizable, but with li with a specific scenario simulation, while avoiding biasing due to details of the photos or even ethnicity cues within the photos.

| 我會試著說服對方，認為我的方法是最好的      |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 非常同意                     | 同意                       | 有點同意                     | 有點不同意                    | 不同意                      | 非常不同意                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 我會試著退一步，互相妥協             |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| 非常同意                     | 同意                       | 有點同意                     | 有點不同意                    | 不同意                      | 非常不同意                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

managerial rank (PDI), were randomly from a photo bank with figures were match ethnic features ed a more realistic

Figure 1. Example survey instrument

All components of the computer survey were presented in Mandarin Chinese, first tested in a back translation task and then pretesting. A popular search portal in Taiwan (Yam.com) hosted a link to the survey site administered on the lead researcher’s own server. Yam.com was chosen for its frequent use by businesspeople and office workers—the preferred sample frame. To test for the possibility of gender influences on the gender variable, another link was hosted within Yam.com where increased numbers of females were reported by Yam.com to visit. Respondents were offered shopping vouchers as incentive for participation. The survey began with a presentation of the negotiation scenario, followed up with three questions from the scenario. The number of questions answered correctly was recorded in the database, and any respondents unable to answer all three questions correctly were later dropped from the analysis. Each conjoint case was presented, one at a time, with all six questions answered each time (the order of cases was random).

## RESULTS

A total of 435 respondents completed the online survey, with 351 correctly answering the three scenario questions (insuring involvement with the scenario), made up of 67% female—confirming the success of our attempt to attract female respondents. Respondents ranged from 18 to 65 years old, with an average age of 28.5. Full-time employed respondents totaled 58%, students represented 31% and 10% were between jobs or self-employed. Eighty-four percent of the sample held undergraduate or higher degrees.

Part-worth utility scores were generated for each of the six dependent variables, with the six Pearson’s Rs ranging from .87 to .99 between observed and actual preferences, and the Kendall’s tau statistics ranging from .64 to 1, all statistically significant at the .05 level. Analysis of variance tests showed significant differences across the three national groups for three of the six questions (Interdependent-face, Other-face, and Integrating-face). Multiple comparisons (Least Significant Difference) demonstrated the American profiles stand out from both Japanese and Chinese profiles (Table 4). These statistically significant differences with the American counterpart’s consistently higher part-worth utility values support Proposition 1 (Chinese respondents will show cross-cultural accommodation to American negotiators). Japanese and Chinese profiles showed very similar part-worth utility means with no statistically significant differences, except in the case of Question 6: Integrating. In the case of integration, American and Japanese were statistically the same, thus Proposition 2 is only partially supported (Chinese respondents will show the same amount of ethnic affirmation to Japanese and Chinese negotiators).

| Dependent variables | Independent variable: Nationality |          |         |       | F-value                                     | Post hoc |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|-------|---|----------|
|                     | U.S.A.                            | Japanese | Chinese |       |   |          |
| Interdependent-face | 9.20                              | -4.79    | -4.41   | 7.30* | U > J. <sup>36</sup> , U > C. <sup>34</sup> |          |
| Other-face          | 9.97                              | -4.08    | -5.89   | 8.66* | U > J. <sup>38</sup> , U > C. <sup>43</sup> |          |
| Self-face           | 4.20                              | -0.87    | -3.32   | 2.13  |   |          |
| Avoiding            | 3.01                              | -0.94    | -2.07   | 0.69  |   |          |
| Dominating          | 0.00                              | -1.97    | 1.97    | 0.58  |   |          |
| Integrating         | 7.75                              | 3.12     | -10.87  | 8.81* | U > C. <sup>44</sup> , J > C. <sup>36</sup> |          |

Note: Significance of part-worth utility means tested with a paired t-test, \*p<.05, values in superscript are Cohen’s *d* effect size, Least Significant Difference paired comparison, U = U.S.A.; J = Japan; C = Chinese

Table 4. Nationality part-worth values

For the remaining independent variables (PDI, MAS, LTO), a paired two-tailed t-test was employed between the two attribute levels of each variable’s part-worth utility value (see Table 5). Managerial rank displayed no statistically significant

differences, rejecting Proposition 3 (Chinese respondents will show a higher tendency towards integrating with high status negotiators than low status negotiators).

Masculinity scores statistically differed for questions 2 and 6 (Other-face and Integrating), favoring male profiles. Breaking out the female and male respondents shows for both questions, male respondents preferred male counterparts to female counterparts, and in the case of integrating, the difference was statistically significant, rejecting Proposition 4 (Chinese male respondents will show an equal tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with men and women). Chinese females did not present a similar gender preference for counterparts, supporting Proposition 5 (Chinese female respondents will show an equal tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with men and women). Long-term orientation of the counterpart does not influence any of the dependent variables, leading us to reject proposition 6 (Chinese respondents will show a stronger tendency to adopt interdependent negotiation tactics with a negotiator who shows a higher long-term orientation).

| Dependent variables | Independent variables: |             |                            |                          |      |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|
|                     | PDI                    | MAS Overall | MAS Female<br>(Respondent) | MAS Male<br>(Respondent) | LTO  |
| Interdependent-face | 2.49                   | 2.97        | 1.86                       | 4.86                     | 2.59 |
| Other-face          | 2.66                   | 3.36*       | 2.08                       | 5.67                     | 1.76 |
| Self-face           | 0.52                   | 1.05        | 1.78                       | 0.27                     | 2.80 |
| Avoiding            | 2.26                   | 0.75        | 1.60                       | 0.74                     | 1.32 |
| Dominating          | 1.77                   | 2.26        | 0.94                       | 4.53                     | 1.87 |
| Integrating         | 2.73                   | 3.55*       | 1.02                       | 8.18*                    | 1.18 |

Note: Significance of part-worth utility means tested with a paired t-test, \*p<.05

Table 5. PDI, MAS and LTO part-worth values

The relative importance of the independent attributes shows that nationality ranged from 36.18% to 39.20% (see Table 6). These percentages were consistently higher than the other three independent attributes. PDI ranged from 17.78% to 20.29%, MAS 18.18% to 20.09%, and LTO 19.09% to 21.24%. These three attributes show similar relative importance percentages, showing that their impact on respondent preferences did not differ. Nationality, on the other hand, considerably overshadowed the other three attributes.

| Dependent variables | Independent Variables: |       |       |       |        |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
|                     | PDI                    | MAS   | LTO   | NAT   | Total  |
| Interdependent-face | 18.26                  | 20.09 | 20.37 | 36.30 | ≈ 100% |
| Other-face          | 18.51                  | 19.20 | 19.27 | 36.99 | ≈ 100% |
| Self-face           | 20.29                  | 20.60 | 19.09 | 36.18 | ≈ 100% |
| Avoiding            | 17.78                  | 20.58 | 21.24 | 36.64 | ≈ 100% |
| Dominating          | 19.92                  | 19.66 | 20.90 | 36.76 | ≈ 100% |
| Integrating         | 19.37                  | 18.18 | 19.72 | 39.20 | ≈ 100% |

Table 6. Relative importance of independent variables

## DISCUSSION

Results show that negotiators from a Chinese culture exhibit more cultural accommodation for a distant culture (American) than a near culture (Japanese)—paying more attention to sacrificing self-interest (interdependent face) and saving face for the other side (other face). For both close and distant cultures, an emphasis on finding an integrative solution is obvious, with more stress on compromise, than a corresponding negotiation with Chinese counterparts. Irrelevant of the counterpart’s nationality, saving face, ignoring conflict, and domination tactics are consistently valued by the negotiator. This emphasis is consistent with observations of Chinese negotiators’ tendency to open negotiations with self-face concerns and dominating tactics (Miles, 2003). These core values appear to be consistent—not affected by any framing of the negotiator’s counterpart.

Chinese respondents, simulating a negotiation, do not consider their counterpart’s rank as important enough to shift negotiation tactics, nor is a stated emphasis of a long-term relationship. However, when the counterpart is male, there is an increased emphasis on saving the counterpart’s face than when the counterpart is female. More interesting, a male counterpart encourages a shift

toward integrative negotiation on the part a male Chinese negotiator. Put another way, a male Chinese negotiator is less likely to stress integrative negotiation tactics when facing a female than a male counterpart—irrespective of nationality. This is not the case for female Chinese negotiators, who show no difference in tactics among counterpart genders. Ko (1994) points to the Confucian gender ethic of Thrice Following, which states that a woman should be submissive to her father, husband, and son. Contemporary feminist values have certainly been adopted in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, yet issues still exist for professional woman (Cheung and Liu, 1999, Kurman, 2001, Yeung et al., 1999, Lee, 1999, Fung, 2000), and the current results show an imbalance between Chinese male and female attitudes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, it is clear the nationality of the negotiator's counterpart is the most important factor studied here, and one that clearly has a role to play in actual negotiations. The sample frame was not experienced negotiators, but represented a cross section of professionals in Taiwan. If a bias is strong across this sample, it is likely to influence not only negotiators, but business transactions at many levels. Appearing similar to a country of origin effect, the counterpart's nationality may be exploitable to gain a more favorable outcome. Yet such an issue is potentially complex, as in Warden's (2002) findings that product descriptions in a Chinese environment when in English obtain a boost in ratings (language of origin effect) for more homogeneous products but not for heterogeneous products. Potentially, a negotiator from a distant culture benefits when the topic is simple or the negotiation is just beginning. In such a case, the Chinese negotiator may try the negotiation in English, which potentially activates higher levels of cultural accommodation, as in Bond's findings (Bond, 1983). However, for longer or more complex negotiations, Chinese language may be used and translators employed, and the accommodation effect reduced. These issues are open for further exploration.

## LIMITATIONS

Both power distance (PDI) and long-term orientation (LTO) results show patterns consistent with existing theory, although the online simulated conjoint experiment may not have accurately reflected a real negotiation situation to produce statistically significant results. Although this is a limitation of the current research, the statistically significant results obtained show at least a strong cognitive bias influenced by nationality of the negotiator's counterpart. Another limitation is the use of only one standardized negotiation context. As previously mentioned, different scenarios may have varying effects. Lastly, the online graphic design may have diluted responses. To improve involvement levels, photos were included in the conjoint experiment—feedback from pretesting pointed to such photos being important. However, to avoid biasing, the photos were blurred and randomized, which may have lessened subconscious emotional reactions. Future research may attempt more detailed scenarios such as more realistic photos or even video.

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