

Cultural Conflicts and Counterstrategies between Russia and China in Cross-cultural Communication

Zhang Yu-xian¹

ARTICLE INFO

Available Online October 2013

Key words:

cross-cultural communication;
cultural differences;
cultural conflicts;
solving strategies.

ABSTRACT

With the continuous development of economy, global economy integration becomes increasingly obvious, and global economy activities increase gradually, leading to the increase of international business negotiation. As one of the factors influencing this phenomenon, cross-cultural communication becomes more important. Russia and China are long-term cooperation trading mates, so the cultural communication between two countries increases gradually. Through comparing cultural differences, the paper first explains cross-cultural problems from politics, economy and society, then puts forward solving strategies, which can contribute to accelerate mutual culture communication, strengthen trading cooperation and promote economic development of two countries.

Introduction

Culture is the basic element for a country's development. It expresses one nation or one country's spirit feature. Culture from different nations, communities and corporations has different value targets and value tendencies. With the increase of cross-cultural communication between Russia and China, cross-cultural conflicts increase naturally at the same time. Through learning cultures of different countries we can understand the countries' backgrounds, current situation of development and the trend of future. The real purpose of the paper is to let Russian and Chinese realize they have the obligation to learn and understand each other's cultural background and history, thus help them find specific solutions and relevant strategies to achieve ambition of reducing cross-cultural conflicts in various fields of communication.

1 Cross-Cultural Conflicts

People often think their own culture is superior, and regard other cultures inferior. Meanwhile, a phenomenon or behavior in one culture is thought to be ordinary or polite, while is thought to be offensive or even regicidal in another culture. Therefore, when people from different countries communicate with other countries, it's easy to meet some profound national cultures that people can't understand or be puzzled, which

¹ Department of Social Sciences, Shandong, Jiaotong University, Jinan, China

cause inevitable troubles.

1.1 Introduction of Cross-cultural Conflicts

If people want to understand clearly about Russian and Chinese culture, they should know the real meaning of cross-cultural conflicts first. Only when people know clearly about cross-culture conflicts can people know how to avoid conflicts in communication.

The generation of culture is based on people's life experience and its survival is on the basis of experience. The different environmental stimulation and function cause people to have different feelings and opinions of their own and special world. When people live in the same environment, they'll have the same feelings and experiences. Living in close environment, these common things are based on tribe or village culture foundation. With the development of history, the connection of human among tribes or villages has increased gradually. People with different feelings, understandings, habits and all kinds of interactions, may cause inevitable conflicts and frictions. Therefore, cross-cultural conflicts are the culture which is determined by the nature of culture, and it is inevitably common phenomenon in cultural developing process. The consequences of conflicts are that one culture absorbs or melts the other cultures, thereupon emerges new culture models and types, such as racial discrimination, different ethnic culture concepts, ideologies and colors. With the globalization of economy, China and Russia communicate with each other more closely. In cross-cultural communication, conflicts caused by cultural differences are becoming increasingly obvious. The article hopes to propose some strategies and tactics to solve conflicts between China and Russia.

1.2 The Reasons for Cross-cultural conflicts

There are many factors that may attribute to cross-cultural conflicts. This part only picks out some important factors to talk about, such as religion, custom, thinking mode and geography.

The reasons causing cultural conflicts are various. Different cultural and historical background inevitably brings differences and conflicts in thoughts, thinking mode and behaviors. With the deepening of China's opening degree, the economic and social communication increase in cross-country, so cross-cultural communication increases gradually, which will provide people more opportunities to contact with Russia. It's a good thing for people to deeply understand Russian society. However, it's not an easy matter, for what people are facing is a strange country and culture. Chinese are facing people totally different from Russians in thinking mode, living style and behavior. When Chinese associate with Russian, cross-cultural conflicts arouse inevitably. These phenomena usually express in privacy, time views, eating habits, holiday words, greetings, dressing forms, figurative languages and social etiquettes. The first one is the thinking mode difference. Russian thinking model pays more attention to logic and emphasis, while Chinese thinking model pays more attention to entire integrity. Chinese usually emphasize intuition, think highly of experience and feeling, and often judge others by self. Compared with Russia, Chinese culture is obviously general and ambiguous. A fixed way of thinking always causes ignorance of individual difference, emotional coloring, and communication misunderstanding. The second one expresses in code of conduct. The specific meaning of

code of conduct is the generalization of the regulations and codes that social activities or individuals abide by in social activities. When people with different cultural background communicate together, they always use their own code of conduct to judge the rationality of the behavior of another party. For example, in China, clapping little child's head is a friendly behavior. However, it's a disrespectful behavior in Russia. The third one is value orientation. People's communicative ability is produced in the process of socialization. In Chinese culture, being modest is able to adapt oneself to different circumstances and collective dominance. While in Russia's culture, individual dominance advocates individual thinking, individual judgment and personal interest supremacy.

1.3 The Reflection of Cross-cultural Conflicts

The reflection of cross-cultural conflicts is really a large topic. It expresses in daily life, business activities, social communities and other aspects. With the development between Russia and China, communication has increased, and cross-cultural conflicts are founded in every field.

The first one is different concept of age. In Russia, no matter young or old, people, especially women all dislike to talk about age. Russian people are very sensitive to age, which may cause mood fluctuation. However, old age means the people full of experience and mature in China. Chinese are unclassified about their age. In different age group, Chinese have different idioms to describe. The second is differences of complimentary language. There are different criteria and realization plans between Russian and Chinese culture. China's features of being polite are respect, modesty, enthusiasm and elegance. Chinese people emphasize to degrade themselves and respect other people through appropriate address and elegant speaking. Russian people pay more attention to individual and personal value, advocate personal confidence and be practical and realistic. Different psychological and polite manners influence communication between Russia and China. They always impede the promotion of cultural communication. The third reflection of cultural difference between Russia and China is the difference of word rhythm meanings. For example, magpie is a festival bird in China, which means lucky and auspicious. Its arrival means something lucky is going to happen. Nevertheless in Russia magpie means enmity. In China, dragons mean the greatest prolong life. Yet, in Russia, dragon is the symbol of evil.

2 Cross-cultural Conflicts in Commercial Communication

Cross-cultural conflicts in commercial communication especially influence people's life, so analyzing which kind of conflicts may happen in commercial communication is very crucial. Three aspects in this chapter will explore the roots, the people's thought and the influence of cross-cultural conflicts in commercial communication.

2.1 Roots of Cross-cultural Conflicts in Commercial Communication

This section has three portions talking about roots of cross-cultural conflicts in commercial communication from different views, which include different origin, cultural consciousness and evolution in different ways,

different national spirits and characters.

2.1.1 Different Origin

Origin is playing extremely important role in the process of cultural communication, and this part is mainly to compare different origins between China and Russia. Different origin has different influence on cross-cultural communication.

China is the Asian country with a long history. Its culture includes native culture, modern western culture and some surrounding cultures. After thousands of years' development, culture has been formed as the pillar since Qin dynasty. Confucianism and Buddhism and Taoism as the pillar, have hundreds of schools of thought of parallel theory construction and culture. Chinese culture has become the representative and the axis of oriental culture. Before the Opium war, due to the geographical position of blocking and the self-creation of civilization, China's culture was not affected by the western culture erosion and moving. The May 4th Movement in 1919 unlocked the door of Chinese culture towards other cultures, thus Chinese culture began to absorb the advanced elements of other culture, especially western culture and Japanese culture, and then a new climax of cultural fusion occurred, which contributed to the leap of Chinese culture. With the development of modern China, the requirement of integration in the world economy, and contact with global culture, absorbing what is best and discarding the dross, have been the tendency of China's culture development.

Russia is located in the Eurasia frontier. The origin of Russian culture came from the relatively open geography, the development of neighbors' culture and the outside world communication. The culture is formed by the influence of cultural varieties and the penetrations of surroundings, rather than the deep-rooted national culture. So it belongs to a typical grafting culture or marginal culture. In history, Russian culture has been influenced by western culture for a long time, and has a baptism of eastern culture. Therefore, Russian culture becomes the combination of western culture and eastern culture.

2.1.2 Cultural Consciousness and Evolution in Different Ways

Since Russia and China have totally different cultural consciousness and evolution ways, they'll choose and develop different methods during the process of communication.

The development of China is full of success, and also accompanied by failure. Chinese culture in its relative region has been spreading in neighboring countries, so Chinese culture has great pride and arrogance on all these matters in the world. China has always been looking down outland culture until it was defeated by western culture. Therefore, they begin to treat outland world in a new complex view. Russia is totally different from China in culture consciousness and evolution. Since antiquity, Russia's culture had been filled with the feeling of inferiority and loneliness. Though its culture is the blending of western culture and eastern culture, eastern culture regards it as outside culture. It was thrown to the edge of the world civilization, away from its own civilization and it was unique. It builds up the spirit of the national capital in natural ways and keeps

away from people who are in many centuries with brilliant civilization and prosperity. The nature of Russian culture pushes them to make efforts to create an independent culture from eastern and western culture. All of these were accomplished by collision and communication. Russia thinks highly of absorbing foreign culture.

2.1.3 Different Common Customs and Thinking Modes

Different customs and thinking modes affect people's behavior and thoughts. Russia and China are different in these aspects, so this part describes deeply about these things.

In the first place, it is about the traditional culture in China's position. Throughout history, China is such a country which has a solid foundation of traditional culture. Its culture belongs to typical regional culture. According to acquisition and ethical basis in people's daily life, religion includes foreign religion and native religion. No matter what kind of religions, all play significant roles in China's progress and development. Among them, Buddhism has the longest and the most profound influence. Buddhism has been introduced to China since Han dynasty and has rapidly developed. It becomes China's one of three pillars in traditional religious culture. Religion holds special dominant position in China's history. About Russian faith, Russian people all have common faith of national religion. Everything has the nature and color of religion all around. Since 988, Eastern Orthodox Church became the Russian national spirit support. It plays an important role in its political and economic world. People can't say there's no orthodox in Russian culture. This kind of cultural religion made Russian people rational, good at fantasy, mystic, and pursue truth spirit. And it also produces it to God as voters to save human as its strong sense of mission. Russian spirit is virtuous. Russian mission is rooted deeply in its spirit. Its religious thoughts are deeply rooted. Russian and Chinese have different ideas in "country" and "home". In Chinese thoughts, family's benefits are higher than country's benefits. "Hundred good filial first". In personal, family is all for him, family exist, world exist. Therefore in general, Chinese care more about family than country. When family profits conflict with country benefits, people are tending to choose family profits. Nationalism plays a dominant role in Russia. In Russian culture, people pay more attention to nationalism and patriotism and pay little attention to family and family consciousness. Russian would like to regard nationalization as everything of the country. The harmfulness of family concept is lower than nationalism. This kind of nationalism is easy to cause the militarism and imperialism.

2.2 Cross-cultural Conflicts of Communication in people's Thoughts

Different people have different thoughts about cross-cultural conflicts of communication. This chapter is talking about people's thoughts for foreign culture and Chinese attitude towards Russian culture, and Russia's attitude for China.

2.2.1 Chinese Culture in Russian thoughts

When Russians talk about China, what they think about are Chairman Mao, friendship between the Soviet Union and China and culture revolution. The Russians who came to China have different views from other Russians who haven't come to China. In the past Russia's attitude and evaluation towards China is impoverishment, lagging behind and low quality. Gap causes misunderstandings for a long time. Until the 1989 Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev visit China, the Sino-Soviet freeze began to thaw. The two countries

have experienced nearly 30 years' estrangement. Another important method for the Russian to understand China is through light industrial goods. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Chinese rushed into Russia to do business. Now more and more Chinese goods have one position in Russian supermarket. Russians know China's development from these products. On the whole, the evaluation of Russian for China is positive, but relatively shallow. With the development of the relation between Russia and China, these problems are converting and improving. At the same time, the knowing of China for Russia is not comprehensive, either. Chinese should improve the cognizance about Russian gradually, and promote the communication between Russian and Chinese.

2.2.2 Russian Culture in Chinese Thoughts

Russian poem says "People can't understand Russia with sense, People can't measure it with standards." Why can the October revolution start in Russia? Why Russia can have super power in the world in dozens of years? Why Russia broke up automatically in last century? The reason is complex. It includes aspects of history, nation, mental, culture and international, of which the most important one is related to Russian character. The Russian are brave, persistent and dauntless, and this character feature is famous around the world. And in order to open the door of Europe, Peter emperor fought for 20 years with Sweden. Russians are careless in small things but careful in important things. When it comes to critical point, they are especially concerned about the development and survival of the country. All of the Russians can stand up with no hesitation, showing fearless spirit. Russia is a military power. Russians dislike spoiling their children. They train their children to have brave spirits. With high self-esteem, Russia is a nation which dislikes to admit mistakes. Russian does not worship foreign things and fawn on foreign countries. It's difficult to see English slogan in Russian streets though it's the disadvantage for tourists. Russian is stubborn and self-pride. China's trade with Russia is mainly on petty commodities and low-cost clothing. Influenced by our country's image, Russian think China is still a poor country as it used to be. Russians would like to solve problems in extreme ways objectively. Russia thinks highly of politeness, and is an exquisite gentleman nation. When people go to theatre to see programs, all the people dress in apple-pie order. In 1998's economy crisis, the Russian ruble face nearly daily half depreciation, people still wait in line outside bank, quite and in order. At the same time our Chinese students back from Russia, when taking elevator, they naturally let ladies first and pay attention to their manners all the time (Zhu daqiu, 2009).

2.3 Influence of Cross-Cultural Conflicts in Commercial Communication

The influence of cross-cultural conflicts is an important part worth researching. It's necessary to know the influence of cross-cultural communication between China and Russia since commercial communication is a significant part in countries' communications.

Russia's main barriers include tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers, and setting up and implementation of trade barriers have a certain difference according to different trade object. When trading with China, Russia's trade presents the feature, that is, tariff barriers set more widely used, technical barriers play a dominant role. Russian trade barriers to the implementation of trade between China and Russia are the effect of the pros and

cons. To a certain extent, it also promotes the development of trade between Russia and China. In order to develop the potential trade better between Russia and China, Russia should reduce unreasonable use of trade barriers as much as possible. However, China should strive to improve the quality and technical extent of export products. Both China and Russia should also strengthen communication and mutual trust and work together to promote the healthy development of two countries' trade. Culture will influence interpersonal communication of business activities from different angles. Cultural forms influence business activity of interpersonal communication. In general, Chinese are conservative while the Russian prefer to be straightforward in communication. Chinese regards Russia's straightforward behavior as rude performance. However, Russian regards China's conservativeness and modesty as the label of fault or unsteady.

3 The relationship of cross-cultural conflicts and thoughts difference

Undoubtedly, different thoughts will directly influence people's attitude on cross-cultural conflicts, and cross-cultural conflicts have different influence on people's thoughts as well. So it is worthwhile to take some time to talk about the relationship of cross-cultural conflicts and thought difference.

3.1 Learning Cross-Cultural difference to promote thought harmony

Learning is an important step in the process of promoting culture communication. When doing culture communications between countries, both parties should learn each other's culture, religion, custom and so on. It's the performance of showing our respect to others.

In the current times, the development of Russian culture is considerably faster than Chinese. In the 19th century, Russian culture had been far away ahead of China. In the 20th century the gap enlarged. Russia's national power strengthened step by step, and national status rose. At last it became superpower in the world. In the 20th century, Chinese had advanced thoughts and wide visions. This is the achievement of reform movement, that is, New Culture Movement and May 4th Movement. Chinese learned to accept foreign culture positively instead of contradicting to foreign culture, such as an attempt to accept Russian culture. China's proletariat led the surge of the national liberation movement and clearly put forward the slogan "Russia as teacher" "Walk the path of Russia"(R.Scollon & S.w. Scollon, 1995). The Soviet Union's ideology and the party of the proletariat have become China's guiding ideology and theoretical weapon. Establishing the socialist system of the Soviet Union has become China's revolutionary goal. In such a background, both Soviet Union ideology and revolution theory are accepted by China's revolutionary. And Russian literature and art have become Chinese writers and artists' model. Russian culture is regarded as one kind of culture overwhelming western and eastern culture. The reasons that Russia has achieved such brilliant achievements result from external cultural communication and collision. Russians pay great attention to absorb the nutrient of external culture. Their own culture's brilliance and appreciation will increase continually.

3.2 Learning of Thoughts Boosting the Step of Cross-cultural Blending

Learning each other's thoughts can help to understand others' thoughts more clearly. So it's necessary for

communicators to learn both parties' thoughts to boost the step of cross-cultural blending.

Culture collision's inner social psychological reason is that people with different background will produce different thinking mode, so the thinking modes of people in two countries are totally opposite. The Chinese way of thinking is comprehensive and overall first. First, Chinese pay attention to things that are overall relevant, set the general guidelines and then talk about details and rules. However, Russians' thinking belongs to analytic way of thinking, namely, thinking of everything from detail to universal, from small to large, from specific to general. Chinese think good relationship is the basic condition of trading and they expect to set a long and stable relationship with cooperation mates. However, Russian culture is based on commodity economy. People in trade activities usually depend on commercial contract, legal consciousness. Russians think business is business. A collision of culture between China and Russia objectively exists. We should be aware of these culture differences in the spirit of seeking common ground while we put aside differences, mutual respect and treating others as equal, with sincerity to achieve consensus and take inclusive respect attitude rather than hostile opposing attitude. Trying to learn each other's national cultural psychology is to achieve the success of cross-cultural communication.

3.3 The Passive Effect of Cross-Cultural Conflicts in Commercial Activities

Everything has its two sides, therefore, cross-cultural conflicts also have the passive and negative effects to commercial activities. So we should manage to take advantage of the positive role and try to avoid passive effects in commercial activities.

Cultural differences affect multinational company's harmony relationship between managers and their local staff, and then prevent the normal activities of multinational companies. Passive influence of the communication between managers and staff easily makes communication breakdown. If managers are unable to rightly face this kind of cultural contradictions, employees will indulge in emotional and irrational states, causing the more misunderstanding and the deeper contradiction. In this case, multinational company's internal staff will confront cultural conflicts. Core staff cultural differences will lead to the loss of multinational company's market opportunities, the low efficiency of organization and global strategy implementation.

4. The Strategies of Cutting Cross-Cultural Conflicts in Communication

Since cross-cultural conflicts in communication are inevitable facts, what we should is to take necessary measures to reduce them as possible as we can. The following will discuss this point from the right attitude to cross-cultural conflicts, the cultivation of consciousness of cross-cultural conflicts, and try to embody the positive effect of cross-cultural communication in every field.

4.1 Taking Right Attitudes towards Cross-Cultural Communication

Facing cross-cultural communication, no matter Russians or Chinese, both of them should insist in right attitudes to deal with cross-cultural communication. The following paragraphs talk about the right attitudes.

Culture difference is a double-edged sword. People with the correct cross-culture view can treat culture differences objectively. In one side, cultural differences will bring troubles and conflicts. In another side it can promote cultural harmony, accelerate culture development of different countries and establish unity of values. Values are regarded as the most important part of culture, and it is a lasting faith. Culture value can determine people's behaviors, communication standards and judge rules of good and bad. We need to find the joint points of two kinds of cultures, and take common advantages of different culture when communicating. In fact, each culture's real contribution is to point out its mutual nuances. The purpose of taking intercultural communication is "extracts piths from others and from its own characters", insisting the policy of "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend". The purpose is to make our world cultural heritages shine brilliantly. Therefore, people have to have a broad mind of "all rivers run into one sea.", not only cherish native culture but also respect foreign culture, both making efforts in explaining ourselves culture and analyzing others' culture. However, no matter how we act, "one distance" should be regarded as premise, the relationship of native culture and foreign culture is based on basic opposite (Gaofei, 2008). People should be good at adaptation, different cultures, thinking modes, values and differences of policy, systems and laws easy to make international communication stalemate, people can't ignore these basic elements. Only knowing clearly about all these factors in cross-culture communication can they better promote each other's communication. Taking right attitude can show our respect to foreign cultures, and we can gain respect from others. In a tolerant attitude and a broad mind to know the world, learning foreign culture is a process of self-improvement.

4.2 Cultivating Cross- Cultural Communication Consciousness

The cultivation of consciousness is important in the process of cross-cultural communication. Consciousness decides people's behaviors, so people should cultivate correct consciousness during the process of cross-cultural communication.

Along with the progress of science and technology, the development of economy globalization and cross-cultural communication are increasing between different countries. However, during the process of communication with different countries, there inevitably exist differences, especially in culture and thoughts. Therefore, adding mutual acceptable communication is the best way to reduce conflicts. In order to promote economic and political understanding in the future, people need to learn different countries' religions, custom habits and characters to enhance mutual understandings. Constant communicating makes communicators' become more and more familiar with each other's cultures. The confusion caused by cultural differences will decrease. The communication quality will further increase (Larry A. Samova, 1994). The cultivation of culture sensitiveness mainly depends on daily accumulation. Culture learning should run through all process of language learning and integration with language learning. Understanding communication elements of similarities and differences is an important step of cross-culture communication. When imparting knowledge,

people need to compare different culture background with target language and language culture in the target language, thus learners can improve their cross-culture awareness through constant specific language learning. In addition, another method people can use to learn its background culture and custom is to read more Russian literatures, watch Russian videos, TV and movies which can reflect Russian lifestyles. Participating in topic discussion of culture background and contacting with Russians can strengthen the awareness of culture differences and grasp the standard of "local culture". People hope foreigners can show respect to their native culture. Every culture has its own social norms, customs, ethnic standards, laws and criteria. If people still behave in its own former way in a new environment, it may be harmful to people's emotions. People need to cultivate empathized ability. In cross-culture communication, people with better communication abilities will care about foreigners' emotions. Adversely, people that take little care of others' emotions are not regarded as good communicators. And also people need to think about the scene of communication.

4.3 Embodying the Positive Effect of Cross-Cultural Communication

There's no doubt that cross-cultural communication greatly benefits Russia and China and boost the step of world culture blending. So exploring more advantages of cross-cultural communication is quite necessary.

The positive effect of Cross-Cultural Communication is to help people know how to establish and maintain positive relationship with people who have different culture backgrounds. People can master how to overcome obstacles in Cross-Cultural communication, ignore passive efforts, pay more attention to positive efforts, realize effective communication skills and strengthen people's ready adaptability. Learning cross-cultural knowledge can guide people to know how to play positive role in culture communication, eliminate conflicts, accomplish double-win strategy and understand people's different thinking methods, so as to achieve effective communication. people should learn how to evaluate culture conflicts and decide how to put forward to solving strategies when faced with culture differences and conflicts. Increasing mutual understanding is the key to the success of cross-cultural communication. Many cases prove that communicators know more about each other's similarities and differences of culture, the chance of success in communication is larger. In fact, in most cross-cultural communication cases, if participators know more or less about each other, they will become familiar with each other by contact. People also know that improper behaviors and violation taboos will cause serious consequences in cross-cultural communications,. So when exploring cross-cultural communication, people should pay attention to the research of behavior standards. Only when people are familiar with its language feature and culture background, grasp their shame and disgusted field can we achieve the aim of making successful cross-cultural communication (Chao zhongchen, 2010). With the increase of international communication, more and more people especially the politicians, the diplomats, the entrepreneurs and company consultants are becoming interested in different country's languages and cultures. The intercultural communication and research studies will greatly promote the international exchange and the peace of world.

Conclusion

Since conflicts are inevitable in cross-cultural communication, we should take objective attitude towards them, and do our utmost to reduce them. We should not only track down the roots of cross-cultural conflicts, such as different origins, different culture consciousness and people's different thought modes, but also see the strong side of cross-cultural communication and take advantage of its beneficial factor in the interactions of all fields, penetrating mutual understanding and belief in it, and then boost culture blending gradually and set up the eternal friendship among the people. Only in this way can people take calm attitude towards cross-cultural conflicts and easily find out the solution to conflicts and bury the hatchet even in the major contradiction.

References:

Chao zhongchen, 2010. *The Cultural Conflict and Fusion between China and Foreign Countries*, p193-241

Gaofei, 2008. *The Evolution of Political Culture Changes and the Relations between China and Russia*, shanghai:The world knowledge press, p221-237

Larry A. Samova, 1994. *Cross-Cultural Communication [M]*, Beijing: Peking University Press, p81-93

R.Scollon & S.w. Scollon, 1995. *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach [M]*, Beijing: Peking University Press, p116-118

Zhu daqiu, 2009. *The Comparison of Sino-Russian Culture*, Anhui: Anhui Education Press, p34-42

Supported by: "The 12th Five-Year Plan" issue of Education Science in Shandong Province. This paper is part of the results of "the 12th Five-Year Plan" issue of Education Science in Shandong Province -- "Multicultural Construction in English Education". Issue Number:2011GZ106