

# Chapter 1

## Culture, Communication, Intercultural Communication 文化、交际及跨文化交际

In international business, as in most other areas of life, the best idea in the world can fail if it's not communicated effectively.

文化是同一人群一代又一代共享、获得和传承的信仰、习俗、价值、行为、制度以及思维模式的总和。人类的任何一种活动，从日常生活到社会活动，无不体现某种文化：中国人在除夕之夜包饺子，美国人在感恩节制做南瓜派；中国人用筷子进食，美国人用刀叉用餐；中国人穿着唐装旗袍参加盛典，美国人穿着西装礼服出席宴会；日本人初次见面鞠躬行礼，美国人初次见面握手致意；日本人在商务谈判之初寒暄客套，美国人在正式谈判前习惯于讲述一个幽默故事，德国人丁是丁，卯是卯地执行方案；企业家从事经营管理，科学家进行科学研究或技术发明，文学家、艺术家从事创作，思想家进行思考……人总是生活在文化中，文化现象在人的世界中无所不在。文化在跨文化商务中表现得更为突出和重要，它是人们理念和价值观的直接体现，直接影响商务沟通效果。通过本章学习，你将全面了解文化的概念及特点，并对以上方方面面从文化角度有更深入的理解。

## 1. Culture 文化

Culture is *ubiquitous*, *multidimensional*, and *all-pervasive*, as we have it almost anywhere and anytime. It is understood differently by people throughout the world. Americans believe that culture is a fast-moving train, which is closely connected with what is going on for the time being. The better you adjust yourself to the present world, the more you understand culture. However, Chinese people believe that culture is closely related to the past. The more you know about *Confucianism* or the past, the more cultured you are considered to be.

*ubiquitous* a.  
普遍存在的  
*multidimensional* a.  
多方面的  
*all-pervasive* a.  
遍及各方面的  
*Confucianism* n.  
孔子学说; 儒学  
*amnesiac* n.  
遗忘症患者

To the outside observers, Americans may seem like a nation of *amnesiacs*; they care more about the next big invention. To the Chinese, the past is always something to be memorized. They are always proud of having the four great inventions in ancient times.

“It is estimated that there are more than 164 definitions of culture.” (Chen, 2005) Culture can be understood in the broad sense and the narrow sense. It can be defined as attributes of man in its broad sense, including what distinguishes man from the rest part of the world. When culture is contrasted with nature, it can be defined as “life way of a population” in its narrow sense, meaning what characterizes the particular way of life of a population. For instance, corporate culture is a culture in the broad sense, as it refers to the moral, social and behavioral norms of one organization based on the beliefs, attitudes and priorities of its members. However, the slogan “quality is life” of an organization is a culture in the narrow sense, as it refers to one specific characteristic of the organization.

### 1.1 Definitions of Culture 文化的概念

There is no agreed-upon definition of culture. Anthropologists actually have managed to give multiple answers to the question, “What is culture?” In the following, several definitions of culture from dictionaries or by scholars both in China and abroad are given for a general understanding of culture and how it is interpreted in different cultures.

Culture is “the total sum of material and spiritual wealth created by the mankind in the process of the social and historical development, especially, literature, art, science, education, etc.; the ability to use the written language and possession of book knowledge; (in archaeology) the aggregation of historical remains, relics of the same historical periods” (*The Modern Chinese Dictionary*, 1998).

Culture is “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively; the customs, civilizations and achievement of a particular time or people; improvement by mental or physical training” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 2001).

Culture means “material life such as material things essential for human survival; social life such as lifestyles, social organizations, and political and economic relation; spiritual life such as religion, philosophy, value systems, science and art” (Liang, 2004).

“Culture is man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves, including shows of emotion, the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function.” (Hall, 1959)

Culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. It is a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group; the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams, 1983).

“Culture is the total accumulation of beliefs, customs, values, behaviors, institutions and communication patterns that are shared, learned and passed down through the generations in an identifiable group of people.” (Davis, 2001)

From the definitions given above we can see that culture can be actually classified into different types when viewed from different perspectives such as anthropological, psychological, cognitive, social, symbolic and linguistic. Since our goal is to focus on the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds, we prefer the anthropological view of culture by Samovar and Porter in our study of intercultural communication. Their definition of culture well serves our purpose. They define

culture as follows:

“Culture is the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Culture can therefore include everything from rites of passage to concepts of the soul.”

Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. Culture also has several properties: It is shared, learned, symbolic, adaptive, and integrated. The definition of culture by Samovar and Porter covers the three components and all the properties. Their definition helps us understand culture for the sake of intercultural communication, as we will study in this book more about “the way of life of people,” “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing,” “the learned behavior,” “a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior” and “a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men.”

## 1.2 Metaphors for Culture 文化的比喻

Trying to define “culture” has certainly produced a torrent of results as shown in the above. It seems that we could fill up an entire volume with definitions alone. However, we can approach the complex, ill-defined nature of this abstract concept by working with metaphors, which can help us explore the dimensions of it from different approaches.

### 1.2.1 The Culture Iceberg 文化冰山

Just as an iceberg which has a visible section above the waterline and a larger invisible section below the waterline, culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected and imagined. Also like an iceberg, the part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole. It is said nine-tenths of culture is below the surface.

**Culture above the waterline.** Culture above the waterline means the aspects of culture that are explicit, visible, taught. This includes how we behave, what we eat, the clothes we wear, how we speak, words we use, thousands of skills and

the information conveyed through formal and informal lessons, etc. They can be understood easily and immediately when they are observed. It is said that only 10 percent of culture is visible, explicit, and taught, but this 10 percent is what we have to learn to understand, assimilate and if necessary adapt to for success while communicating with other cultures.

Mongolians are very serious and composed in their expressions. In the city, this is beginning to change slightly. You'll see a number of my students smiling. But this is not traditional. When I first came here, my friends asked me why Americans smile so much. They felt that Americans smile even at people they don't like and that was quite insincere. —Lisa Buchwalder ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov))

**Culture below the waterline.** Every culture, past and present, has to decide how to satisfactorily solve common human problems and concerns. What matters is the culture below the waterline, which is also called “hidden” culture: the habits, assumptions, understandings, values, judgments that we know but do not or cannot interpret in a direct way. Usually these aspects are what we encounter every day, but not taught directly.

Actually a great deal can be found below the waterline, such as concepts of beauty, justice, etc., relationships to animals, patterns of superior-subordinate relations, incentives to work, notions of leadership, tempos of work, ways of decision-making, attitudes toward dependents, approaches to problem-solving, designation based on age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, etc., nature of friendship, ordering of time, concept of self, preference for competition or cooperation, body language and notions about logic and validity and so on.

### 1.2.2 The Culture Onion 文化洋葱

Culture can be imagined as an onion, consisting of multiple layers.

**Culture in the outer layer.** Much like what has been described in the culture iceberg, the outer layer the of culture onion consists of symbols, such as the way people are dressed, the language they speak, the cars they drive, the food they eat, the houses they live in, etc. It is just what we can see and understand immediately. Such

a part of culture is like what is illustrated in the culture iceberg above the waterline.

When a foreigner is in Japan, he will discover that Japanese ladies are sometimes dressed in *kimono*, Japanese men drink *saki*, and the Japanese sleep on *futon* rather than beds. He will realize that he is in a different culture when surrounded by all these.

kimono <i>n.</i> 和服
saki <i>n.</i> 日本米酒
futon <i>n.</i> 蒲团, 日本式床垫

**Culture in the middle layer.** When we go deeper we can see something different from what is in the outer layer, something more complex than what occurs in the outer layer. It is the culture in the middle layer. The middle layer of the culture onion includes norms and values, such as greetings, respect for the tradition, etc. People in the same group usually have the same norms of behaving in order to be accepted by other group members. In Chinese culture, students are not supposed to say anything that will make their teachers feel embarrassed, especially in the past, such as difficult questions, in case their teachers lose face.

**Culture in the inner nucleus layer.** The inner nucleus of the culture onion concerns the invisible culture. On this level, there is much about the things rooted in people: power relationship, the value of being equal, the relationship between people, etc. For example, what is the purpose of living? It is quite accepted by the people in Japan that people “live to work.” If you work extra hours, you are praised. On the contrary, the Mexican people believe that people “work to live.” Money and work are not the most valuable things in life; spending time with friends and family is more important than working.

Actually, the three layers are closely connected and influence one another. The inner nucleus layer influences the middle layer, and then the middle layer works on the outer layer. What we can see every day is usually what is shown in the outer layer. But to understand and control the middle layer and inner nucleus layer is the goal of studying culture.

### 1.3 Characteristics of Culture 文化的特点

In order to better understand culture, it is useful to examine its characteristics. The following six major characteristics are generally accepted and shared around the world.

**Culture is shared.** Members of a culture share a set of ideals, values, and standards of behaviors, and this set is what gives meaning to their lives, and what bonds them together as a culture. For example, almost all people living in China share the Chinese language, dress themselves in similar styles, eat similar foods, and celebrate many of the same holidays or festivals. When Spring Festival comes, for example, Chinese people all over the world will celebrate it in the same way: wearing new clothes, setting off firecrackers, eating dumplings, extending good wishes for the New Year, having *antithetical couplets* on doors and hanging lanterns.

antithetical couplet  
对联

**Culture is learned.** Culture is learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes.

Children begin learning about their own culture at home with their immediate family. When they are growing up in the community, their cultural education is advanced by watching social interactions, taking part in cultural activities and rituals in the community, and their own relationships and their places in the culture are gradually formed. In intercultural communication, effective interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, ability to deal with cultural uncertainty and cultural empathy toward others can be learned and enhanced through intercultural communication training and practices. An open mind and a willingness to learn from experiences will help people get over communication problems and adapt to new cultures.

An American boy was born in the United States, but grew up in China, as his parents were doing business in China. He finished his primary school and junior school in China. At school he studied and played with his Chinese classmates and spoke Mandarin. But he spoke English with his parents at home. What troubled his parents most was that his thinking and behaviors were just identical to a Chinese boy's, which often made his communication with his parents difficult.

The story of the American boy shows culture is not inborn or intrinsic. Surrounded by the Chinese culture, he learned many solutions to certain problems that the Chinese culture sets for him. Once these solutions were learned, his behaviors became automatic.

**Culture is symbolic.** People have culture primarily because it enables them to communicate with symbols. Symbols allow people to develop complex thoughts and to exchange those thoughts with others. Language and other forms of symbolic communication, such as art, enable people to create, explain, and record new ideas and information. In China, children usually give senior parents a birthday cake with a large peach in it on their birthday, wishing that they will live as long as possible. The cake here is called Good-health Cake, a symbol of good health and longevity.

A piece of red cloth or even two or three pieces of red cloth can often be seen hanging or tied on cars in China. When the drivers are asked for the reasons, they will tell you that it's for the sake of safety. In Chinese culture red color is a symbol used for driving out evils or misfortune.

Cultural symbols can take various forms, e.g., spoken word(s), handwritten or printed word(s) or picture(s), nonverbal actions, objects, etc. In China, the Great Wall is a great symbol to the Chinese. The Great Wall is not only a wall, but a symbol of greatness, which is well illustrated in the poem by Mao Zedong, "He who does not climb the Great Wall is not a true man." It is almost a dream of every Chinese to climb the Great Wall in their life. Similarly, in the United States, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of American freedom to Americans, and is among the most recognized symbols worldwide.

**Culture is integrated.** To keep the culture functioning, all aspects of the culture must be integrated. Such an integration of culture is like a big tree: Some aspects of the culture are the roots, some are the branches, some are the leaves and some are the fruits. For example, the language must be able to describe all the functions within the culture in order for ideas to be transmitted from one person to another. Without the integration of language into the fabric of culture, confusion and dysfunction would reign and culture would fail.

**Culture is dynamic.** Culture is subject to change. It's dynamic rather than static, constantly changing and evolving under the impact of events and through contact with other cultures. It changes through three most common mechanisms: innovation, *diffusion* and *acculturation*.

diffusion *n.*  
传播  
acculturation *n.*  
文化适应

Innovation or cultural innovation refers to the introduction of new thoughts, norms, or material items from a different culture, such as the slogan “Time is money.” Diffusion is the spreading of cultural items from one culture to another. For example, Hollywood movies are popular with people throughout the world, and more and more Chinese people have begun to know more about the U.S. through these movies. Acculturation is the process which adopts the changes brought about by another culture and develops an increased similarity between the two cultures. Take business in China as an example. About 20 years ago, many Chinese businesspeople put friendship first rather than abiding by business rules. With so many foreign companies set up in the country, many Chinese businesspeople have gradually changed their ways of managing business. They have become in favor of the international standard or practice that business is business, friendship is friendship.

**Culture is *ethnocentric*.** Ethnocentrism is the belief that your own cultural background, including ways of analyzing problems, values, beliefs, language, etc., is superior. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to look at the world primarily from the perspective of one’s own culture. Ethnocentrists believe their culture is the central culture and other cultures are incorrect, ineffective, or *quaint*. They may take it for granted that their own cultural behaviors are the standard ones and different behaviors are *alien*.

<p><b>ethnocentric a.</b> 种族(民族)中心主义的</p> <p><b>quaint a.</b> 古怪的</p> <p><b>alien a.</b> 异己的; 不相容的</p>
--

## 2. Communication 交际

Communication, the basis of all human contact, occurs wherever there are human beings. When a baby is born, it cries. The crying is communication. When you achieve your goal, your friends come and say, “Congratulations!” The word “congratulations” is communication. When you run into a friend on your way to school in the morning, you greet him, “Good morning!” The expression “good morning” is communication.

### 2.1 Definitions of Communication 交际的概念

It is as difficult to define communication as it is to define culture. The American scholars, Dance and Larson (1972), in their book *Speech Communication: Concepts*