

A Comparative Study of Communication Styles between China and America

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Abstract: *The relationship between China and America is getting increasingly close. A growing number of people hope to know more about American culture and their way of life. The chief purpose of this paper is to assist people in gaining more knowledge about China and America's culture, to efficiently deal with cultural conflicts, and promote the national association between China and America. This paper includes specific cases about the differences and similarities of communication styles between the two countries. The reasons why these differences emerged are also stated. This paper compares the preferences of topic selection, usages of the personal pronoun, taboo words under specific conditions, and their different views towards life and death, and summarizes the characteristics of their communication styles. In the light of these contrasting cases between the two countries, we make a crucial step in helping people know more about differences between the two countries, improving intercultural communication, and avoiding misunderstandings between China and America.*

Keywords: *China and America's communication styles, intercultural communication, cultural difference*

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication includes a wide range of aspects. While a great number of intercultural studies have been done on communication style between America and China by the experienced, it is difficult to make a thorough assessment of differences and similarities shared by the two countries mainly for a lack of objective criterion of comparison. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to make a comparison of the two countries and to assist people to find the similarities and differences from an objective perspective. This paper is based on the assumption that intercultural communication between the two countries takes place frequently and several potential problems need avoiding.

This paper is to discuss the differences and similarities between America and China in their communication styles. Communication styles in this paper refer to a wide range of face-to-face interactions among people which facilitates cooperation and daily activities, especially the strategies people use to communicate, like the difference in choosing topics of talk, non-verbal communicating, and some words that one should not say under certain circumstances. This study is an analysis of how American and Chinese people talk, how they use verbal and non-verbal words to express themselves; how they express agreement and disagreement; how they pay attention to taboo words. Based on the cases study, distance work, and classroom study of the relevant contrast between the two countries, this paper advocates the authentication of communication styles of the two countries and takes an important step to better understand intercultural communication and avoid cultural conflicts, which will eventually contribute to better communication and cooperation between America and China.

Jia (1997) mentioned that cultural difference in language behavior is non-translatability, which means the same words have different functions under different situations. Takao (1973) pointed out two unique research perspectives: cultural semantics focuses on the natural environment outside the language and the study of human speech focuses on the social environment outside language. The relationship between language and culture is namely the relationship between language and environment.

This paper anticipates providing some guidance and reference for people to understand different styles of communication. Besides, in the following development process, the understanding of communication style and the study of intercultural communication will be further dependent and completed to form a more perfect system.

This paper is based on the previous study and combines the facts with opinions and at the same time, helps readers to be aware of the importance of intercultural communication styles.

2. Culture and Communication

2.1. *The Relationship between Culture and Communication*

The definition of culture varies among people. Learning a language equals learning a culture. Different definitions of culture reflect different theories for understanding and the criteria for evaluating human activities. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952) published a detailed list of 164 different definitions of culture, in which they stated many definitions from other people and divided the definitions into several groups. They introduced the general history of world culture, its definition, some statements about culture, and a summary and conclusions. One of the definitions can be simplified as follows: culture is shared, learned human behavior, and it is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.

Culture is shared means it is a social phenomenon. Culture is learned, not biologically inherited. Culture involves the way people think, the way they deal with problems, and what they produce. Therefore, beliefs, knowledge, and values are part of the culture.

It is difficult for one to learn a language well without knowing the culture behind the language. The way people communicate with others is affected by the environment they have been living in, which is their cultural background. Culture can be divided into two types: high context culture and low context culture, which is developed from Hall(1990), who described the concept of high context communication like this: most of the information or messages in the communication are either in the physical context or internalized in the person, but is rarely coded, explicit, or transmitted. Low context communication is opposite to high context communication, which means information in low context communication must be explicit, direct, and elaborate because people involved in the communication are not expected to know each other's background.

From Hall's definition, it is obvious that low context communication depends more on words being spoken while high context communication relies less on words but other factors like people's emotions or environment. This is one reason why great artistic works remain until today and artistic works that release their messages at once do not.

No culture can be precisely defined as a high context or low context. Commonly, some culture is high context while others are the low context. American culture is towards the low context, while China, with a great and complex history, is thought of as high context culture.

This paper treats culture as an objective reality and departs from the superorganic approach in that it insists that culture includes its human carriers. At the same time, many researchers agree that culture is a phenomenon that can be observed, and it is a unique possession.

This paper is based on the assumption that communication has something to do with culture and people's need to interact with other human beings. People need social contact with others, and this need is fulfilled with the exchange of messages that work as bridges. Messages come into being through human behavior. When people talk, walk, shake their hands, or any other gesture, they are behaving. Such behaviors are messages that are used to communicate something to someone else. These behaviors can only be called messages under the following two conditions: they must be observed and they must convey meaning.

Communication comes in a great number of forms, such as vision, audition, or tactus, and it relies on the messages that need conveying. Different types of communication may be more effective or less effective. People may be good at one type of communication while turning a blind eye to another. People communicate with one another to a greater or lesser degree and those who are more social tend to be more communicative. The language that human beings own is the richest and most complex, even though some species have relatively large vocal categories and extensive communication networks.

As a result, it is difficult to say for sure which culture belongs to which context, some communication develops in high context culture while others develop in low context culture. However, American culture is developing towards low context communication. Americans depend on words to communicate, usually, they are serious when they say something. Here is an example: Iraq had made a terrible cross-culture mistake in 1991 when the foreign minister of Iraq and the secretary of state of the United States had a meeting in Geneva to make a compromise that would avoid war. The half-brother of Iraq's president was seated next to the foreign minister of Iraq. He kept informing Baghdad to provide them with his judgment of what was going on. The secretary of state of the United States made it very clear that they would attack Iraq unless Iraq moves out of Kuwait. However, it was Iraq's custom to pay attention to how people say

something instead of the content. Therefore, the half-brother of Iraq's president reported to Baghdad that the Americans, who were not angry, would not attack and they were only talking. The United States attacked Iraq six days later, causing Iraq to lose about 175,000 of its citizens and an estimated \$200 billion in property damage.

It is well-known that people express themselves not only verbally but also non-verbally. In some cultures, such as the Middle East, people may pay more attention to gestures, tone of voice, or level of voice. The secretary of state of the United States may not have understood why his message did not get through, because in the American culture when they say something, they mean it. America has a relatively short history, a lack of historical background makes it easier for Americans to accept changes and they do not have cultural deposits to rely on.

On the other hand, China, the possessor of a long history and a complicated culture, is developing towards high context communication. China's cultural background had changed little during the past three thousand years. To understand certain words in Chinese, one needs related background information. For instance, there are four tones in Chinese, a change in the tone may mean a change in the meaning, and one must know the Chinese culture first to know words that appear in Chinese literature. However, in English, the tones are not as abundant as it is in Chinese, which means there is no need for one to know the pronunciation of the word to read it.

The cultures of America and China, in other words, the West and the East, really distinguish each other a lot. It is due to two separate cultural systems. As the Yellow River is the mother river of China, its culture has developed for thousands of years and had formed its styles. The Chinese culture has gradually gone overseas to Japan, especially in Tang Dynasty, which has integrated into the Japanese society and later shaped the Japanese culture and society today. Communication played a crucial role during this integration. The Yellow River exerts a certain influence on Chinese culture, likewise, the European culture also has some connection with waters. From 1607 to 1776, the colonists of England settled on America, which had brought the England culture together over the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, American culture has a lot in common with European culture. The European culture is considered originating from Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome.

The differences in language systems also add to forming the two cultures. For instance, the language in the East is pictographic while the Western language mainly belongs to Latin. However, the most significant factor that has an influence on culture and communication is the long distance between China and America. The long-distance makes it hard for the two cultures to communicate with each other not until the Qing Dynasty, which has resulted in their ways of development with almost no conflict from each other.

2.2. Intercultural Communication Styles

In this paper, intercultural communication refers to how we express ourselves, such as our thinking and our verbal and non-verbal behavior. Some scholars define intercultural communication precisely as "intercultural communication involves interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems differ enough to influence the communication event." (Samovar, 2000, p.8)

In 2005 Saphiere, Mikk and DeVries defined communication style as the way we communicate, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that comprises our preferred ways of giving and receiving information in a specific situation. If the message content is the what and the communicators the who, then communication style is the how. They also held the opinion that communication styles should include the way people complete the following tasks: ① organize and present information and like it to be organized ② encourage and like to be encouraged ③ agree or disagree with others' ideas and prefer agreement or lack thereof to be communicated ④ build relationships, trust, and intimacy with others ⑤ communicate politeness and perceive politeness to be communicated ⑥ negotiate and prefer to be negotiated with ⑦ establish credibility ⑧ approach, manage, and resolve conflict ⑨ make decisions and solve problems ⑩ interrupt and prefer to be interrupted.

Therefore, from this definition, it is obvious that communication style has a broad range, also, our behavior reflects our preferred way of interacting, our cultural background, and how we would like to be treated by others. Communication style is how we convey a message to each other. The social system developed by us is very complex, as a result, we have to develop a complex pronunciation to interact properly with many different individuals we meet daily and to maintain many relationships.

Even non-verbal communication is influenced by culture and people's personalities. For instance, it

is widely accepted that people nod to show agreement, and shake heads to express disagreement. However, it is just the opposite in some Asia countries, where shaking heads means agreeing. Another example is making eye contact. Americans prefer looking people directly in the eye to show respect, while Chinese consider it impolite to look someone straight in the eye. People in other countries, such as Japan, also avoid eye contact, but some Japanese do look others directly in the eye to show they are listening carefully and trying to understand what the other person involved wants to convey.

Therefore, to be specific, Saphiere, Mikk and DeVries(2005) consider that a full definition of communication style should include the following six parts: ①communication style is a situational tendency instead of a type. ②the style we use is influenced by many factors. ③as with the culture, everything's relative with communication style ④neutral descriptions are needed, yet those descriptions have their weakness and liabilities ⑤communication style provides a link between the observable and the unconscious-between behavior and its underlying motivation ⑥ there are advantages and disadvantages to every style.

This definition of communication style shows that communication style refers to a wide range of aspects, mostly behaviors and messages being conveyed in the process.

3. Verbal Communication: Language Customs of China and America

3.1. Topic Selection on Chatting

Most Chinese start learning English at primary school, and they may think they still are not able to communicate with foreigners even though they have been learning English for more than ten years. The reasons lie in how Americans and Chinese express themselves and the language habits they have formed under certain cultural backgrounds. For example, when talking with Americans, little background information is needed, in contrast, to understand Chinses, a certain degree of background information is needed. Americans and Chinese have formed different ways of starting a conversation and choosing the topics on chatting.

Peng (1991) made research between Chinese and Japanese on the question "when you are talking with acquaintances, would you like to choose the following topics to further the relationship?" and he gave the following answers: 53% of Chinese will ask questions about family, with 70% will introduce their family members. 85% of Chinese will ask about the place where they are living, 65% will choose to ask about occupation, and 35% will ask about payment.

From this research, it is obvious that most Chinese tend to choose family, occupation, and payment as topics when making conversations. It is common for friends or relatives to say to each other "Have you eaten lunch/breakfast/ supper?" in China as greetings or when they want to start a conversation. It is nothing more than an American way of saying "hi" or "hello". But many Americans will think they are being invited for a meal when they are asked such questions. Moreover, the elderly, whether they are conscious or not, prefer to say "where are you going" or "have you eaten breakfast/lunch/supper?" when they greet someone, because in China, as a famous saying goes "bread is the staff of life", food is of great importance to people since ancient times. However, the Chinese are gradually changing their preference on topic selection in conversation. In China, especially the middle-aged, tend to ask others about their education, age, and family, even when they have met for the first time. While some may think it is common to ask such questions, a growing number of people are thinking it impolite to ask personal questions when they first meet each other. Unlike China, in America, people seldom ask others such personal questions like age, payment, marriage, or children. They do not greet others like Chinese by saying "you are getting thinner!" "Have you been putting on some weight recently?" or "you look handsome with your hair cut off".

Americans consider ego the most crucial method for knowing the world and they depend on their personal experiences, which gives direction to their communication pattern. Therefore, Americans tend to change topics many times until they find a certain experience that they share. And they tend to begin the search again after a short exchange on topics like sports, vacation, work, or marriage until they find something in common. Usually, a conversation will not be continued if the overlap in their experiences is few or not enough. An additional conversation may be pursued and gradually develop into intimacy if they have sufficient shared experience. American base conversations on action and experience. Since most Americans prefer a wide and shallow relationship with others, combined with their direct and explicit communication styles, it is not uncommon that Americans are accustomed to reveling much

information about themselves in almost any situation where communication happens.

All in all, when people communicate, it is not only important to understand words, but also to understand each other's cultural background and habitus, which will make it easier for further communication and avoid misunderstandings effectively.

3.2. Usages of Personal Pronoun

Personal pronouns play a very significant role in communication under different cultural backgrounds. No matter which language we speak and which cultural background we are in, we cannot avoid thinking about how to address others if we want to make it a good start or leave a good first impression. People often tend to choose what they consider most appropriate under the situation where they are in. China is widely regarded as a polite country, where people prefer using language to show respect. For instance, when asking people's names, the Chinese always say "nin gui xing?" while Americans prefer using coordinate nouns to say "what's your name?" The expression "nin" in Chinese is the same as "you" in America, but it had a more respectful meaning. Other personal pronouns, like "you" and "I", express equivalent relationships.

Moreover, it is our common sense that in a restaurant, when people want to call a waiter, instead of saying "you, come here!", we say "excuse me." to draw their attention. Unlike Americans, the Chinese are not so concerned about addressing the old like "lao renjia", under such a situation, most aged people will not feel offended. However, in America, it is considered extremely impolite to address the old with the word "old people", because Americans value their age and they do not like to be considered old. In America, when people say something or someone is old, it usually relates to negative meanings, for they think of "old" as "useless" or "slowing others down".

Chinese is an analytic language and there are no inflexions, personal pronouns help people to express their meanings more effectively. While English is a synthetic language with inflexions, people can express themselves clearly with inflexions. For example, it is analytic to express love with a look or a touch, and synthetic to say "I love you." English, therefore, provides speakers with more words to express affective and cognitive states. Chinese, on the contrary, demands that its speakers imply and infer meaning from the context like the way it is said, by whom, to whom, where, and when.

Cultures such as Chinese that stress analogic communication are referred to as high context, which is rich and difficult to feel fully accepted. In China, the use of personal pronouns is very helpful in communication. Under certain circumstances, it is hard to properly express their exact meaning without using personal pronouns. For instance, Wang (2014) described the following situation: Chinese like to say "ni ji dian chu men? (when do you set off?)" or "nin shen me shi hou lai? (when will you come?)", which will sound strange without personal pronouns. How people address family members also varies in China and America. The Chinese way of addressing their family members is focusing on oneself, that is, different from the relationship the speaker has with other family members. In Chinese, "brothers" and "sisters" are widely used expressions that can refer to those who are older or younger than the speaker, while "father" and "mother" are limited to certain persons. Chinese do not avoid using kinship addressing terms to communicate with strangers. For example, the word "aunt" in American refers to the speakers' relative, but in Chinese, a stranger can be addressed as "aunt (a yi)", especially when parents want their children to be polite, they will ask their children to greet middle-aged women like "a yi hao." which is the same meaning as saying hello.

Cultures such as American that stress synthetic communication are referred to as low context, which tends to be flexible and comfortable for foreigners to fit in. In America, they also use "brothers" and "sisters", but people cannot tell from these expressions whether the person they are talking about is older or younger than them. In contrast, Chinese use "sister" only when they want to refer to a wide range, and they use "jie jie" to refer to the sister who is older than the speaker and "mei mei" to refer to the younger sister. It is also the same while they use the word "brother". There are few differences in such expressions between written language and spoken language.

There are mainly two reasons for which the usage of personal pronouns differs. The first is the diversity of social culture in which Chinese and Americans are in. China has a history of more than three thousand years while America has a relatively short history. What's more, America is said to be a culture pot, which indicates there are a great number of cultures in their society, but China's mainstream culture is monoculture.

The second reason is the various circumstances they are in. A majority of people tend to select the

proper manner on how to address others in making conversation. A variety of situations they are under decides the way people use personal pronouns. Americans think highly of ego and individual, thus they use first-person pronouns more often; Chinese value collectivism, under which people tend to consider collectivity an important factor in forming society. Chinese focus on the group, consequently, they use plural first-person pronouns frequently. Occasionally they use plural first-person pronouns which function as singular first-person pronouns but only to emphasize and to express stronger emotion.

3.3. Some Expressions under Specific Conditions

Some words that are inappropriate when people communicate with others are called taboo words, and the majority of us are aware of when and how to avoid using such expressions that will make others feel offended. Although many factors have caused the above phenomenon, one considerable factor is society. Taboo words are very common in every country. However, due to the diversity of cultural backgrounds, sometimes it is not easy for people to tell whether an expression is proper in a country, and it may result in misunderstandings in intercultural communication. China and America may have some taboo words in common, but there exist more differences. It is widely known that Americans consider thirteen to be ominous, while Chinese think four is inauspicious. Moreover, among the Chinese youth, they use “six” to praise someone they think has done something extraordinary. Sometimes they say “six, six, six” to emphasize how remarkable the person or the situation is. On the contrary, the Western consider that six hundred and sixty-six is equivalent to the devil, Satan, or something related to death. According to the New Oxford Annotated Bible (2007), six represents incompleteness or imperfection, because it is one less than seven, which represents completeness. The three “six” have different meanings: the first six means the false religions that Satan had deceived man into believing; the second six is the deceived false government of this world, and the last six is the symbol of the economic system that is self-centered.

As a result, if the Chinese do not know such expressions about numbers in the west, a serious cross-culture conflict is bound to happen. There are no minor matters in dealing with foreign matters, even though people involved may hold the opinion that trifles need not be taken into account. As an old saying goes: “A small leak will sink a great boat.”

Chinese like to use homophonic, take chicken as an example, Chinese think the pronunciation of chicken represents fortunate, therefore they prefer giving presents wrapped in paper with the image of chicken on it. On the other hand, in America, they relate chicken with the “crowd”. If a Chinese uses chicken as a greeting for happiness to an American, they are bound to have cross-culture conflicts. Another example of such expressions is the dragon, as is described by Si and Wang (2018): in China, dragon is worshipped in myths and legends as a deified animal and a potent symbol of auspicious power. Dragon represents propitious, which is one of the traditional cultures in China. In immemorial times, dragon stood for imperial power, and the artifact used in the palace was decorated with dragon. Dragon ranks number five in the twelve Chinese zodiac signs, which shows its importance in Chinese people’s hearts. While in America, dragon is described as something evil. In the Christian culture, dragon is usually described as having a body similar to a cougar, two bat-like wings, four legs, and a head that looks like a horse head.

As is stated above, to avoid cross-culture conflicts, people have to know that dragons have different meanings between America and China, which signifies Chinese should not use dragon as a symbol of good luck and happiness when they want to give presents to Americans. In some Chinese rural areas, people do not harm snakes because snakes are thought to be maturing dragons. Adversity will fall on those who harm snakes.

The same expressions have different meanings in various cultures and countries, which generally also has something to do with age, gender, education, situation, relationships between listeners and speakers. Children have fewer taboos words compared with adults, while men relatively have fewer taboos words than women. Besides, people who have received higher education are less likely to be restrained by taboo words because they can think of more words and expressions to replace taboo words. If the conversation takes place in a formal situation, then expressions should be noted. On the other hand, there is no need for people to pay special attention to taboo words if they are equal in status.

Taboo words in China and America have similarities and differences, which is a common phenomenon influenced by cultural differences, moral principles, even religion. A great number of taboo words can be seen in literature, idiom, and how one address another person in daily communication. It is obvious that in taboo words, there exists great diversity. Therefore, analyzing and trying to understand the diversity of taboo words is an efficient method to avoid cultural conflicts and make cross-culture

communication go smoothly.

3.4. Types of Communication Styles

Knowing how to communicate with others includes more than knowing grammar, reading, or writing. Most Chinese already have been able to answer questions in English, and they can well understand each other. However, one cannot be considered mastering English unless he knows the language custom, idiom, and the proper way of using words and expressions. Communication in business and daily life is different. People have to choose their words in formal situations. Cultural conflicts and misunderstandings will happen if people express themselves in a way considered impolite in other countries. Moreover, while communicating with Americans, it hinders if we do not know about identity, hierarchy, frankly speaking, and the fact that male and females' ways of communication vary a lot.

The first type of communication style between Americans and Chinese is the work-life balance. Americans tend to view work and life as separate things, and they seldom bring matters in life into work. Scarcely will they choose home office because it makes them difficult to divide life and work. The Chinese, on the contrary, lower their work efficiency if they have met with some trouble in life, and they often bring work home. Yang and Guo (2009) stated that most Americans hold the opinion that work and life need to be balanced. Life should not be disturbed by work. Only in recent years have they begun to work overtime due to the economic downturn.

The second type of communication style between Americans and Chinese is the sequence. Americans prefer saying important things first, therefore, when they are making a presentation, they will say the conclusion first and concisely. When doing business, Americans prefer stating their points at the very beginning, then negotiate with their partners because they prefer trying out different solutions before coming to a final consequence. On the contrary, the Chinese state their key points at last, and a long foreshadowing is needed to draw a conclusion. Chinese tend to try out solutions only after a problem is thoroughly understood. "Within Chinese conversational style is a tendency to respond in terms of expectations, goals, even models rather than mundane facts" (Murray, 2009, p.13) As a result while doing business with Americans, we have to state our conclusion in the first place, or we will be considered inefficient. In business negotiation, when a problem has risen, Americans tend to immediately search for a solution and they are likely to miss the entire point.

The third type of communication style between Americans and Chinese is a formality. Americans are problem-oriented, yet they prefer informal chatting with people they meet. Americans value equality and they believe that no person is inherently better than any other. This sense of equality is expressed in their communication style by their willingness to chat freely with others about activities and experiences across a wide range of social classes and circumstances. They believe that treating everyone in the same way is respectful. However, their informality is not so common in other countries. In China, formal communication is demanded under some circumstances by predecessors or by the aged. Formality is also extended to strangers and acquaintances if a relationship is needed. A failure in following appropriate form may indicate a serious flaw in moral quality.

Communication styles also vary between males and females. Generally, females have different communication styles than males. Guo (2007) has drawn the following conclusion: females' intonation is more standard and vivacious than males, and the words they use are gentle, and they prefer using question and exclamatory sentences. Besides, females tend to pay more attention to grammatical correctness and their language reflects more emotional features than males. On the contrary, males' language tends to be more tough and direct, they use more imperative and statement sentences. Such gender differences are caused by social, physical, and context factors, which interact with each other and keep the oral language of males and females in a dynamic process. Although gender differences exist in American communication styles, it is only within a limited group. The dominant American communication style is to persuade others. The Americans think highly of controlling one's feelings, making the facts right, and giving the facts straight. Americans commit to convincing others into believing in their opinions. American communication is based on logical and technical information. Therefore, the words used in conversation must be precise and technical. American communication relies on language which conveys information abstractly apart from the uncertainties. It pursues objectivity, different from the Chinese, which depends on social and interpersonal relationships.

Based on the above cases and analysis, the American communication styles can be summarized as direct, problem-focused, informal, and persuasive, while the Chinese communication style is inexplicit, unexpressive, dissuasive, and reserved.

3.5. Different Views towards Life and Death

Besides the difference in words and expressions, the different views about life and death that Chinese and Americans hold also matter a lot in communication. The movie *The Farewell*, released in China on January 10, 2020, narrates a story about Bili, a girl who was born in China, grew up in America. Her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer, and all of her family members went home from America and Japan in the name of holding a wedding for her grandson, Haohao. But Bili's parents went home to China without her, because she wants to tell grandmother the truth so that grandmother can have the chance to do whatever she wants and to cherish the valuable time and make it worthwhile. Bili relied on her credit card to buy a ticket back home to China. Having grown up in America, Bili cannot understand why her parents and other family members choose to conceal the truth and tell grandmother a lie. Then there comes the core contradiction of views between life and death in America and China. Bili struggles to discuss with her other family members whether it is proper to conceal the truth and tell grandmother a lie, which is a theme of this movie.

This movie is stated from an objective angle, instead of sermonizing, only an American-born Chinese girl who meet with cultural difference. People may view this movie from different perspectives, sometimes it is from cultural differences or personal experiences, but it has nothing to do with right or wrong, it is the event that matters. Cultural difference is one of the most obvious factors that cause conflict in the family.

From this movie, it is clear that Americans view life individually, while the Chinese value collectivity. An individual should obey the law, and collectivity thinks highly of family relationships. Americans regard life as something that belongs to oneself, while Chinese consider life to be something that is deeply connected with the whole family. With the development of the internet, the west and the east have a more profound impact on each other. The east values collectivity, morality, and protection while the west values individualism, power, and freedom. A single choice isn't provided here, and there is no right or wrong in either of these two value systems. Whether a patient should be informed about the disease, when to inform ought to be based on the patients' psychological enduring capacity.

In America, if one is diagnosed with cancer, with only a few months left, does he or she have the right to be informed? The answer to this question is definitely yes. It is illegal to conceal patients' state of illness. The inspection results should be told to the patient first, then the patient has the right to decide whether to tell family and friends. In the movie, *Paddleton*, released on February 9, 2019, Andy and Michael, who are neighborhood, Michael was diagnosed with cancer one day, and Andy kept his company until the last minute. In this movie, Michael was told the result directly by the doctor and he can ask for euthanasia.

The movie represents a typical American way of informing about incurable diseases, which reflects Americans' view towards life and death, and it seems unimaginable from the Chinese's point of view. Chinese avoid talking about incurable diseases or death openly. Moreover, the Chinese never resist a "white lie", believing that not knowing the truth does good to the patient's mental and physical health, and therefore lengthens life. Doctors can even help to conceal the truth, which means the right to live is before the right to know. Chinese tend to have such wishful thinking. They think their family member cannot bear knowing such heavy news as they have cancer and facing death, and they make the choice in the place of the patient, and they fulfill the wishes that they assume the patients should have.

In conclusion, Americans view life as an entity, but the Chinese view life as a whole. One cannot say which view is right and which view is wrong because there only exist different value systems between America and China on life and death.

4. Non-verbal Communication

4.1. Personal Distance

Psychologist R. Sommer was the first to raise the concept of personal distance, and he defined personal space as an invisible and inviolable area around people. Edward (1990) formally defined personal distance: as the physical distance between people when they communicate with each other. To be specific, personal distance refers to the distance made when people interact, and it refers to the physical distance between both sides, which differs from a psychological distance and social distance.

Personal distance plays a significant part in communication. Keeping proper personal distance can

promote cross-culture communication.

Edward (1990) divided personal distance into the following four parts: ①public distance like making a speech, can reach 360cm ②social distance like official receptions, reaches 120-130 cm ③personal distance that people can touch each other, they know each other but have no further relationships, can reach 45-120 cm ④intimate distance among couples, best friends, or family members which can be within 45cm.

In China, the intimate distance among family members is close to 45cm, because most Chinese are introverts and they are weak in expressing their feeling or emotion. Family members value filial piety and respect each other, which means communication with family members is one-way. Children should obey their parents' opinion, and the husband usually makes decisions. Children must respect and obey their parents. On the contrary, the intimate distance is more than 45cm in America, which means family members communicate in two-way, and American children can have their ways of dealing with problems while listening to their parents. In America, family members seldom interfere with each other, and the atmosphere around the family is full of freedom, equality. The relationship between parents and children is parity and mutual respect. American children prefer moving out after they get married, unlike Chinese children, who usually live together with their parents. In public places, such as attending a lecture, waiting for a bus, Americans prefer keeping at least one meter away from strangers, which is almost the same as Chinese, in both countries, people are always inclined to keep a relatively far personal distance from strangers.

In addition, the intimate distance among best friends in China is closer than in America. For instance, girls can walk hand in hand on the street without being considered queer; boys can walk shoulder to shoulder showing they are best friends. On the contrary, in America, if boys walk shoulder to shoulder as some Chinese boys do, they are likely to be considered in love. And American girls seldom walk arm in arm like Chinese girls do, even if they are best friends.

The followings are the reasons for the above behaviors. First of all, the Chinese are influenced by Confucianism and the traditional three principles and five normal, which stipulate the distance between male and female, parents and children. Americans think highly of individuality, which contributes to forming their bright and cheerful personality. Besides, it takes time for the Chinese to be befriended by a stranger because they are introverted people. Americans are outgoing people, and they do not reject chatting with strangers.

Most importantly, as time goes by, personal distance is also changing. For instance, the distance between teachers and students is shortened, and in some companies, an equal personal distance between employers and employee is in demand. Nowadays, the young are not as cautious of strangers as before, and they are willing to befriend strangers. In America, personal distance is not so seriously divided. Family members do help each other when they are in trouble and need help. Cross-culture conflicts can be effectively avoided if we are aware of keeping proper personal distance between China and America. People should hold a positive opinion about different value systems and cultures, and strengthen their awareness of different cultures to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings.

4.2. Body Language

Non-verbal language is also crucial in communication. Anderson (1999) stated that instead of viewing non-verbal communication as the opposite of verbal communication, it is more like a process of generating meaning by behavior other than words.

Non-verbal language includes a great many aspects, which makes it difficult to completely analyze all of them. Thus, the following content focuses on analyzing body language. Verbal and non-verbal language is equally important in avoiding cross-culture conflict. If people attach enough importance to body language, interpersonal relationships can be improved tremendously. Cross-culture communication happens frequently, which shows people an obvious sign that knowing how to properly use non-verbal language is becoming increasingly significant.

Non-verbal communication can be divided into three parts: the first part is paralanguage, such as speed of sound, quality of sound, tone, intonation, and volume. The second part is the environment where communication takes place, like distance, decoration, and space. The third part is body language, which refers to gestures, motion, facial expression, eye contact, costume, and attraction.

In body language, eye contact can be classified into three types. First: when making eye contact in official business: when in formal places, people should look above the other person's eyes, and the most

proper manner is to look at their forehead. Second: when making social eye contact, people should look between the other person's eyes and the jaw, to be specific, the triangle domain includes the eyes, nose, and jaw. Besides these two types of eye contact, intimate eye contact is limited among best friends, couples. In this type of eye contact, it is proper to look at the upper part of the body.

Americans prefer to look others directly in the eye to show respect, while some Chinese avoid doing so, which makes others feel stressed.

Other than eye contact, people use other body language to ease anxiety whether they are conscious or not. Men tend to adjust their neckties to ease themselves from agitation or discomfort. Generally, men touch their necks to relieve stress, because the nerves in the necks can lower the heart rate. When a person touches his or her forehead, it usually is a sign that he or she is in hesitation or feels unease. Moreover, when people approve of each other or they feel at ease with others, they tend to lean on the other person. People can do such imitating movements when they are children. Similarly, when people meet with someone or something they do not approve of or disagree with, they tend to move their bodies to the opposite side.

Other than what is stated above, gestures also differ between America and China. For instance, in China, thumb down means downward, while in America, thumb down shows disagreement or defiance. In America, crossing the index finger and the middle finger up means making wishes, or praying for good luck. In China, such a gesture shows add up or someone is in good luck. What's more, in China, palm down usually means calling someone to come over, but in America, such gesture can also be used to call a dog to come to you.

Cultural differences result in different body languages, which play a significant part in cross-culture communication. Body languages are important in expressing emotion and spreading information. Having the ability to know what message body language is conveying under different situations is a practical method to improve efficiency in cross-cultural communication.

5. Conclusion

Intercultural communication is a study of both psychology and sociolinguistics. This paper states the characteristics of the communication styles between America and China in language customs, non-verbal communication, and some expressions under certain conditions and it also mentions topic selection, usages of a personal pronoun, personal distance, body language, and different views towards life and death.

Most studies of intercultural communication aim at limiting misunderstandings when people communicate with foreigners and they focus on how to minimize misunderstandings after they happened, instead of focusing on how to avoid cultural differences. They point out that context has an enormous influence on intercultural communication. Without understanding, one cannot communicate effectively with foreigners. Being aware of some basic language customs of China and America such as the ways of greeting others, the usage of personal pronouns, and making sure what we are not expected to say when we talk to people from other cultures may help people build up hypotheses about some causes that result in cultural conflicts and minimize culture conflicts. And high-context communication and low-context communication are mentioned generally. Misunderstandings are likely to occur if Chinese do not understand that Americans prefer low-context communication, or Americans do not understand the Chinese way of high-context communication. Therefore, the comparisons made in this paper aim at helping people know more about cultural differences in communication styles between China and America, to effectively avoid potential cross-cultural conflicts in intercultural communication.

Understanding cultural norms and rules between China and America, such as the way people are expected to greet others, the way they think of life and death, and the way they communicate are important in improving communication with people from other cultures. These examples stated in the paper illustrate the importance of studying the influence of culture in communication if we are to overcome cultural barriers and communicate effectively.

In doing so, people can obtain a better and clear understanding of cultural differences through comparison, to contribute to effective communication between China and America.

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