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Research on Cross-Cultural Conflict Management in Chinese Enterprises under the Belt and Road Initiative by Integrating Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture

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ABSTRACT

This study innovatively integrates Confucian culture and the concept of a community of shared future for mankind" into cross-cultural conflict management. research. By using the cultural integration approach of cross-cultural conflict theory as a breakthrough, the study adopts the "Western framework with embedded Chinese elements" method. This approach imparts new cultural connotations to Confucianism and integrates them into Western management theories, thus forming a new cultural integration framework. This framework includes: "righteousness" based on corporate social responsibility, "benevolence" based on business ethics, "ritual" based on institutional theory, "wisdom" based on organizational learning, "trust" based on social network theory, and "moderation" based on stakeholder theory. The goal is to realize a shared cultural and interest community in multinational enterprises. This system explores the understanding and coexistence between diverse cultures by reinterpreting the meanings of "benevolence," "righteousness," "ritual," "wisdom," "trust," and "moderation," promoting "equal dialogue" and mutual prosperity among multicultural communities in multinational enterprises. Through equal dialogue and interaction, cultural differences and disputes can be resolved, achieving the ideal corporate cultural atmosphere of "all things grow together without harming each other, and all paths can coexist without contradiction."

Keywords: Cross-cultural conflict, Confucian excellent culture, Western framework with embedded Chinese elements, cultural integration, equal dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

With the deepening development of the Belt and Road Initiative, an increasing number of Chinese enterprises are expanding internationally and actively participating in the construction of the Belt and Road, becoming an important force in promoting trade and economic exchanges

both at home and abroad. However, due to the complexity of the global operating environment, multinational operations face unprecedented opportunities as well as significant risks and challenges. Approximately one-third of well-known multinational companies are facing internal tensions due to poor management of diverse corporate cultures. Seventy percent of surveyed companies believe that cultural integration is the greatest challenge in multinational operations, and 85% of multinational ventures fail due to mishandling of cross-cultural conflicts (Patel, 2009; Roger Miller, 2000; Zhuang Enping, 2021). Cross-cultural conflict is likened to a minefield and swamp for enterprises "going abroad." While it is often overlooked, its proper handling is undoubtedly of great importance.

Looking at domestic and international research on cross-cultural conflicts, most studies adopt Western theoretical frameworks, with few scholars integrating China's excellent traditional culture into the governance system for cross-cultural conflicts. Confucian thoughts such as "moderation," "benevolence," "righteousness," "ritual," "wisdom," and "trust" contain profound management wisdom. Additionally, the innovative transformation of the "community of shared future for mankind" concept based on Confucian culture reflects the cultural communication solutions rooted in Chinese wisdom, revealing the future direction of contemporary global cross-cultural communication. This offers important insights into handling cross-cultural conflicts. In the face of the global backlash against Western-led modernity, the modern "order" of global cross-cultural communication is being deconstructed. Amidst the background of the "great changes unseen in a century" (Li Xinren, Li Chengzhi, 2021), when the cultures of various nations are truly confronting one another, integrating excellent traditional culture into the governance system for cross-cultural conflict and achieving a new framework for cross-cultural communication, transitioning from the "monologue" of Western culture to a "dialogue" between different cultures, is of great significance. This provides Chinese wisdom for handling cross-cultural conflicts in Chinese enterprises.

RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT ON CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT AND OVERVIEW OF CONFUCIAN CULTURE

Development of Cross-Cultural Conflict Research

Beginning in the 1960s, foreign scholars started researching cross-cultural theories. In contrast, cross-cultural research in China began relatively late, with the emergence of joint ventures after the reform and opening up, which propelled the development of cross-cultural studies. The following is a summary of the research on cross-cultural conflict management theories.

Current Status of Foreign Research:

Thomas (1974), from the perspective of interpersonal conflict resolution, proposed five basic conflict management strategies: competing, avoiding, compromising, accommodating, and collaborating. However, due to its limitations, this strategy is not suitable for handling cross-cultural conflicts. Rahim (2000) classified conflict management styles into five types: avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising. Tjosvold et al. (2003) summarized them into three types: cooperation, competition, and avoidance. Nancy (1983) proposed three solutions for resolving cross-cultural conflicts: domination, compromise, and integration. Among them, the integration strategy emphasizes mutual respect, recognition of differences, and complementarity, forming a new organizational culture where "you have me in you, and I have you in me." This strategy has strong stability and is suitable for handling

cross-cultural conflicts in multinational companies today. Therefore, this study will build upon the integration strategy of cross-cultural conflict management and further incorporate traditional excellent culture to form a specific cultural conflict management model that can guide the cross-cultural management of enterprises "going abroad."

Current Status of Domestic Research:

Chinese scholars Yu Wenzhao and Jia Yong (1997) conducted empirical research on nearly 30 Sino-foreign joint ventures from Germany, Japan, the United States, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other regions, as well as interviews and questionnaires with 28 managers from 19 companies. They proposed a management model for resolving cross-cultural conflicts—the Common Management Culture (CMC) model. This model aims to integrate diverse cultures into a new set of values for the enterprise on the basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences. As such, it holds significant reference value for multinational operations. Most other domestic studies focus on strategies for managing cross-cultural conflicts (Li Yanliang, 2006; Xu Li, 2006; Liu Pu, Jing Runtian, 2006), with relatively few studies on the theories and mechanisms of cross-cultural conflict management.

Confucian Culture

Confucian Management Wisdom:

Confucian culture stands out among the various schools of thought in Chinese philosophy, embodying the mainstream ideas and core values of traditional Chinese culture. It has become the ethical framework that guides everyday life for the common people. Confucian thought originated from the records of governance experiences and lessons from various dynasties before the Zhou period, and for over two thousand years, it has served as the guiding philosophy for managing the state. This shows that Confucianism has always had a deep connection to management, from its inception to becoming the mainstream philosophy (Xu Lei, Deng Yanfei, 2019). The core of Confucianism revolves around the study of human value, ideals, morality, interpersonal relationships, and the relationship between humans and nature. Its core values—"benevolence," "righteousness," "ritual," "wisdom," and "trust"—along with the concept of "harmony in diversity" in communication and "embracing all cultures" in its cultural perspective, undoubtedly provide invaluable spiritual wealth for modern corporate culture management. These ideas also offer significant insights for managing cross-cultural corporate environments in multinational companies. Some Western scholars predict that Confucian thought will become the dominant philosophy of the 21st century, and ideas such as "the unity of heaven and humanity," as well as those aligned with globalization ethics, will have a profound global impact.

Community of Shared Future for Mankind:

In November 2012, the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China formally proposed the concept of "a community of shared future for mankind." The idea of a "community of shared future" is an elevation of the concepts of a shared interest community and a shared responsibility community. It encapsulates China's commitment to a correct view of interests and morality and represents a strategic approach to thinking about the future of humanity—what can be called the "Chinese plan." President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of respecting the diversity of world civilizations and promoting exchanges between civilizations to overcome barriers, mutual learning to transcend conflicts, and coexistence to surpass notions of superiority. Therefore, the ideal of civilizational exchange and dialogue should not

depend on the extent of differences but on the amount of consensus reached by both parties. In dealing with cultural conflicts, all parties must be able to engage in equal communication and dialogue, avoiding exclusion or replacement. The goal of cultural exchange and dissemination is mutual benefit, not a zero-sum game. From a cultural perspective, the community of shared future for mankind can, to some extent, be viewed as the innovative development and creative transformation of Confucian culture in contemporary times (Li Xinren, Li Chengzhi, 2021). Thus, the concept of a "community of shared future" respects global diversity and integrates Confucian traditional wisdom into the global governance system, offering a new "Chinese solution" to cross-cultural communication and exchange.

THE ROOT CAUSES OF CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN CHINESE ENTERPRISES' "GOING GLOBAL"

Differences in Values

The differences in values are the fundamental cause of cross-cultural conflicts. According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, there are six cultural values that mainly affect management activities and decision-making models: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Values lie at the deepest layer of culture, governing people's attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Generally speaking, values are the hardest to change among various factors, and they have a deep-rooted and subtle influence. Values directly affect people's ways of thinking, behavior norms, and so on. Employees from different cultural backgrounds have different values, and conflicts between employees are essentially conflicts of values (Zhang Ying, 2019).

Barriers to Cross-Cultural Communication

Barriers to cross-cultural communication are the direct cause of cross-cultural conflicts. There are several barriers in cross-cultural communication. First, ethnocentrism, which refers to the belief that one's own culture is superior to others, favoring the lifestyle of one's own group, and using one's own lifestyle as the standard to negate or belittle the lifestyles and cultural achievements of other groups. Second, stereotypes, which are fixed and generalized ideas about certain groups of people. Stereotypes lead people to overly emphasize the general impression of a group while ignoring individual differences, resulting in a loss of objective judgment toward another cultural group. Third, prejudice, which refers to negative attitudes toward others based on incorrect or outdated stereotypes. These factors lead to negative evaluations, such as "strange," "mysterious," "ambiguous," and "unfamiliar," during communication between parties. In this context, employees from different cultural backgrounds will inevitably experience conflicts.

Differences in Thinking and Work Habits

Differences in thinking and work habits are significant causes of conflict. Western thinking tends to be linear, while Eastern thinking is spiral. Additionally, Westerners' reasoning methods differ from those of Chinese people. Westerners rely on large quantities of data as the most reliable evidence, while Chinese people often rely on implicit meaning, which "can be understood but not fully articulated." As a result, different cultures often misunderstand each other during communication, and the other party may feel misunderstood. Furthermore, differences in work habits, such as the concept of time, are also important factors in causing conflicts. For example, in Chinese enterprises operating overseas, the practice of casually

extending working hours to increase production is commonplace in China but often meets with strong opposition from local communities in cross-national operations.

Differences in Behavioral Norms

Differences in behavioral norms are an important and often overlooked factor in causing conflicts. Political, social, and religious conflicts also bring about instability in cross-national operations, increasing the risks of managing cross-cultural conflicts. Due to differences in political and legal systems, such as disparities in property checks, product quality standards, taxation, environmental protection, and labor protection policies, cross-national operations can face significant risks. Additionally, religious beliefs are also an important cause of cross-cultural conflict. The countries along the Belt and Road Initiative encompass nearly all types of global religions, with about 80% of the total population having religious beliefs. Different religious beliefs result in different customs and habits. If Chinese enterprises abroad fail to address this issue properly, they may inadvertently violate religious taboos, leading to religious and cultural conflicts. In summary, the various factors that lead to cultural conflicts are intertwined and often exacerbate the occurrence of conflicts, making cross-cultural conflict management more challenging. Therefore, effective cultural integration in multinational operations is particularly important.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT AND INTEGRATION

Cross-Cultural Communication Model

Based on an analysis of the factors that lead to cross-cultural conflict, this section further clarifies the process of cross-cultural communication and conflict. The cross-cultural communication model is as follows:

A View from an Intercultural Perspective

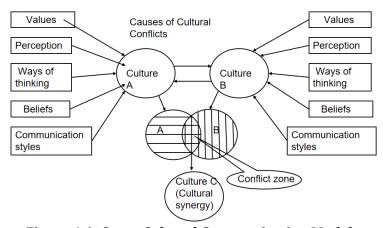


Figure 4.1: Cross-Cultural Communication Model

The diagram above illustrates the process of conflict that arises when cultures A and B communicate. Different cultures have different values, communication styles, beliefs, etc., which inevitably lead to cultural conflicts during international business operations. The overlapping area between cultures A and B represents the cultural conflict zone, where differences and conflicts exist in areas such as management strategies, management styles, etc. This model suggests that enterprises, during cross-cultural management, need to create a

hybrid culture, Culture C, which integrates different cultures. In multinational cultural management, cultural integration is essential to ensure that different cultures respect and complement each other, recognizing and valuing their differences. This will lead to the formation of a new, harmonious corporate culture where the boundaries between cultures are blurred, a culture that is highly stable and possesses strong "hybrid" advantages (Hu Qingjiang, Ma Libing, 2005).

Cultural Integration Framework and Model

This section combines Confucian thought with Western management theories, adopting a "Western body with Chinese embedded" approach, to redefine the concepts of "Ren" (benevolence), "Yi" (righteousness), "Li" (ritual), "Zhi" (wisdom), "Xin" (trust), and "Zhongyong" (the Doctrine of the Mean) with contemporary meanings. These are integrated into Western management frameworks such as "Corporate Social Responsibility," "Corporate Ethics," "Institutional Theory," "Organizational Learning," and "Stakeholder Theory," to achieve the goal of building a "community of interests" and a "community of culture." This process deconstructs the Western cultural subjectivity that has been constructed based on inherent standards and breaks free from the rigid concept of "similarity without harmony." This framework aims to explore the creation of a new Culture C, where multinational enterprises can engage in equal dialogue, mutual respect, and learning from each other. In the pursuit of "public good," various cultural subjects, through "organic integration," can create a corporate culture environment where they can coexist symbiotically.

Explaining "Ren" (Benevolence) from the Perspective of Corporate Ethics:

"Ren" is the core concept of Confucianism, and Confucian thought is built on the idea of "Ren." Confucius defined "Ren" primarily in two ways: one, "the benevolent person loves others," and two, "to overcome oneself and return to ritual is Ren" (He Jinlu, Wang Liping, 2019). "Ren" calls for multinational enterprises to love their employees, customers, investors, all stakeholders, and even non-stakeholders, and to love people from all cultural backgrounds. It requires respect and understanding, abandoning cultural prejudice and hostility, and creating a multicultural, harmonious corporate atmosphere to build a good corporate image.

Explaining "Yi" (Righteousness) from the Perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility:

"Yi" in Confucian ethics means dignity, friendship, righteousness, goodness, fairness, justice, and appropriateness (Deng Qiubai, 2006). "The noble person loves wealth, but obtains it through righteous means," Confucianism does not merely emphasize "Yi," but advocates for pursuing "benefit" based on "Yi." This is similar to corporate social responsibility, where businesses must use "Yi" as an internal constraint, focus on product quality, fulfill legal responsibilities, and prioritize the interests of stakeholders. At the same time, enterprises must use "Yi" as an external constraint, actively engage in public welfare, as seen in Chinese enterprises along the "Belt and Road" initiative helping solve infrastructure gaps, talent shortages, and funding challenges in African countries. By promoting projects related to drinking water, education, and environmental protection, they have received widespread praise and established a strong corporate social responsibility image.

Explaining "Li" (Ritual) from the Perspective of Institutional Theory:

In his 1985 work Institutions and Organizations—Ideas, Interests, and Identities*, Scott defines institutions as including regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that provide

stability and meaning to social life (Richard, 2010). In Confucius' thought, "Li" is the manifestation of "Ren," and "Ren" is the ideological content of "Li" (Li Yuan, 2012). China is renowned as the "Land of Etiquette," and "Li" requires multinational enterprises' managers and the companies themselves to meet two aspects of "ritual." First, as a social organism, the enterprise must comply with the laws, regulations, and customs of the host country. Second, the enterprise must adhere to "ritual" in its interactions, particularly in managing relationships with stakeholders.

Explaining "Zhi" (Wisdom) from the Perspective of Organizational Learning:

Fiol and Lyles argue that organizations can achieve "learning" by absorbing better knowledge and deepening understanding, thereby improving the process of actions (Fiolcm, 1985). "Zhi" in the *Analects* of Confucius appears as "knowledge," representing one of the four virtues, and embodies great wisdom. "The wise are not confused, the benevolent are not worried, the courageous are not afraid," wisdom refers to the ability to discern the principles of things, and not be blinded by external factors, thus maintaining one's true nature (Lan Min, 2014). "Zhi" is central to the concept, aligning with organizational learning theory. "Zhi" calls for multinational enterprises to value talent, recruit, and utilize it, enabling individuals from different cultural backgrounds to leverage their strengths. The enterprise should also focus on training and learning, such as regular or irregular cross-cultural training to enhance employees' ability to handle cross-cultural conflicts.

Explaining "Zhongyong" (The Doctrine of the Mean) from the Perspective of Stakeholder Theory:

Coase first introduced the concept of "firm contract theory," which posits that a company is essentially a "collection of contracts" and agency relationships (Freeman RE, 2005). "Zhongyong" is Confucian methodology, referring to a balanced and appropriate method, always applicable. Confucius emphasized that one's behavior should be appropriate, moderate, and neither excessive nor insufficient. In simple terms, it is about maintaining the right "degree" (He Jinlu, Wang Liping, 2019). "Zhongyong" requires enterprises to manage relationships with stakeholders carefully. First, they need to handle the relationship between the company and individuals to achieve harmony and mutual benefit. "Do not do unto others what you do not want done to yourself," enterprises and individuals should consider the perspective of the other party. Second, enterprises should manage their relationship with society, aligning corporate interests with societal interests to achieve harmony and mutual benefit. Third, enterprises need to manage their relationship with the environment, ensuring harmonious coexistence with the environment.

Explaining "Xin" (Trust) from the Perspective of Social Network Theory:

Social networks were initially defined as "a set of unique connections between specific individuals." Confucius' understanding of the central importance of "Xin" is reflected in three aspects: First, "Xin" is a guiding principle for governance; second, "Xin" is a requirement for social interactions; and third, "Xin" is a level of self-cultivation (Lin Rong, 2005). "Being trustworthy, keeping promises," "Xin" refers to multinational enterprises adhering to self-discipline, not deceiving employees or consumers, maintaining honesty in business, and ensuring consistency between words and actions. "Ren," "Yi," "Li," "Zhi," "Xin," and "Zhongyong" encapsulate the wisdom necessary for establishing Culture C, providing important guidance for cultural integration. Thus, drawing from traditional Chinese culture,

this research employs a "Western body with Chinese embedded" approach to achieve the goal of both a community of interests and a community of culture, establishing the following cultural integration framework (as shown in Figure 4.2). In Culture C, cultural differences are respected, cultural individuality and creativity are preserved, and the advantages of multiculturalism are fully realized. This model holds significant reference value for the management of crosscultural conflicts in "going global" enterprises along the "Belt and Road."

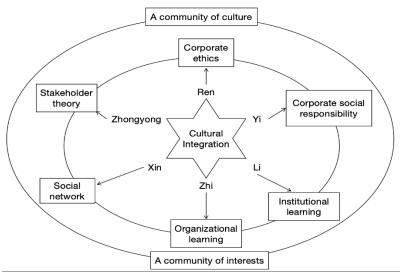


Figure 4.2: Cultural Integration Framework

CONCLUSION

Chinese excellent traditional culture is a valuable spiritual resource that holds significant value for reconstructing the concept and thinking of cross-cultural communication. Core ideas such as "Ren" (benevolence), "Yi" (righteousness), "Li" (ritual propriety), "Zhi" (wisdom), "Xin" (trust), and "Zhongyong" (the Doctrine of the Mean) contain the wisdom for cultural integration. By incorporating China's outstanding traditional culture into cross-cultural conflict management mechanisms, on the one hand, Chinese enterprises can vividly tell the "story of Chinese excellent traditional culture" through their specific practices in cross-cultural management. This can replace the negative stereotypes about Confucianism in many people's minds with the dynamic and modern image of an enterprise. On the other hand, innovatively leveraging traditional culture provides Chinese enterprises with the confidence and foundation to engage in dialogue with world cultures as they go global under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is of great significance for advancing the Belt and Road construction and strengthening "dialogues" between different civilizations. This study, by integrating both Chinese and Western theories, provides new solutions for cross-cultural integration, aiming to offer new ideas and perspectives for cross-cultural conflict management in Chinese enterprises under the BRI. At the same time, we hope that more cross-cultural researchers in the future will further explore how to better incorporate Chinese excellent traditional culture into crosscultural research systems, proactively engaging in dialogue with the world, treating each other equally, learning from one another, and promoting the creative development of human civilization. The research is supported by the International Training Program for Outstanding Young Scholars in Higher Education of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education.

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