

Theoretical Frameworks in Cross-Cultural Communication Research

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Abstract: *This paper critically reviews the theoretical frameworks underpinning cross-cultural communication research, with the principal aim of elucidating the nature of intercultural interaction, clarifying the dynamic relationship between culture and communication, and enabling communicators to generate accurate predictions of communicative outcomes. It synthesizes a range of theoretical perspectives proposed from diverse scholarly traditions, highlighting how these models collectively contribute to the ongoing refinement and theoretical expansion of the field. By mapping the conceptual landscape and identifying core explanatory mechanisms, this review provides a consolidated foundation for future empirical inquiry and theoretical advancement in cross-cultural communication studies.*

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication; Theoretical framework; Culture-communication nexus; Predictive validity; Theory development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is rooted in culture, and we have always been committed to studying the issue of balance between communication and culture. How to find a balance point between communication and culture and apply it to our daily lives has always been a focus of research and attention for scholars, linguists, and sociologists in various countries. If people's daily communication deviates from its foundation and the principles that inspire it, that is, the special culture on which it relies for survival, it will lose its essence and vitality. Meanwhile, without communication and cultural exchange, communication cannot proceed smoothly. Therefore, there exists a relationship of mutual influence, interdependence, and interaction between these two aspects. Communication in social life also influences and guides people's way of thinking in certain aspects. The cultural differences, lifestyles, ways of thinking, values, and social norms in different societies require different approaches to cross-cultural communication in practical implementation. For example, cultural conflicts and communication errors, which are sometimes unavoidable and may have corresponding consequences, sometimes even tragic.

2. IN SPECIFIC HUMAN INTERACTIONS, DUE TO DIFFERENT OCCASIONS AND SITUATIONS, CULTURES CAN BECOME COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

In the process of gaining a sense of social existence, the constant switching of environment, occasion, and specific situations, communication enables people to determine, maintain, establish, and strengthen their cultural identity. Due to cultural differences, there are differences in communication culture. With the continuous growth of people, they have become familiar with and mastered a series of rules that can be applied to different social situations, adapted to different interactions, and can be applied to different occasions, groups, and times. Communication norms have also emerged. In other words, in the continuous development of human society, people have mastered different cultures, such as regional culture, religious culture, and group culture, which have nurtured different social and social relationships in different cultures.

From a theoretical perspective, people with different cultural and social backgrounds also have different ways of behaving, which is reflected in differences in lifestyle, education, age, personality, hobbies, nationality, class, politics, economy, and other aspects. Therefore, in practical communication, it is impossible for speakers and listeners to achieve 100% agreement in accepting and understanding the content and information conveyed. From this perspective, these differences are not inherent. The result may be that in our daily lives, when people from different cultures communicate with each other, their cultural connotations may be similar or vastly different. Cultural differences may exist between different nationalities and political beliefs; It is also possible for cultural differences to occur among people of different social classes, regions, age groups, beliefs, and educational backgrounds within the same culture.

People's behavior, activities, and gestures strictly follow established rules and are carried out within a specific customs, habits, and social norms. Different societies have different customs, habits, and behavioral norms. So, communication errors are bound to occur during communication. For example, Chinese people have strong plasticity in communication. They are reserved and introverted, and often do not express their opinions and thoughts directly. However, in the eyes of Americans, this communication style is perceived as "vague," "ambiguous," and "indirect," because in American culture, people advocate for "straightforward and quick language. But in Chinese culture, such a direct expression often appears impolite. For example, American culture advocates values such as individualism and heroism. However, in history, individualism has been seen as abnormal, incorrect, and even treated as a "rat crossing the street" in China, which everyone shouted at. This difference is also reflected in how to treat the elderly. Respecting and caring for the elderly is a traditional virtue in China, but in some social concepts, the elderly are equated with "uselessness". In some social and cultural contexts, what is highly praised and enjoyed is "talking endlessly" and "boasting", even continuous disputes and discussions, and mutual debates and accusations are seen as a manifestation of people's strong abilities and ideas. Therefore, those who excel in this field are envied, and in some social cultures, people do not like to speak, are not good at expressing themselves, have a special preference for "few words" and "silence is golden", and feel disgusted with those who "compete in words" and "speak fast".

Every culture has its own unique system that is different from others. These social rules tell people which behaviors are accepted by society in daily cross-cultural communication, and which behaviors are not accepted or even despised by society; People should have their own understanding of what they like, hate, what is beautiful, what is ugly, what kind of behavior is just, what behavior is normal, and so on. Researchers refer to these rules and behavioral norms as values or value systems. This set of values cannot be seen, touched, or felt; But it exists constantly, guiding and regulating people's social activities and behavior. In Chinese society, although we have not formed a traditional set of values, we have always followed an irresistible value orientation in people's hearts, which is as firm as a rock and cannot be shaken.

3. IN TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING THE UNIVERSE, CHINESE CULTURE ADVOCATES THE TRADITIONAL IDEA OF THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND MAN, WHILE WESTERN CULTURE ADVOCATES THE SEPARATION OF HEAVEN AND MAN

The meaning of the unity of heaven and man is: people revere nature, worship nature, obey the laws of nature, and act and do things according to the development of nature. The behavior and activities of human society cannot be separated from the gifts of nature. Nature endows people with everything, and humans interact with nature in harmony and unity. Under the influence of the concept of harmony between heaven and man in China, people tend to adopt a holistic and global perspective, and place greater emphasis on intuition and perception in their thinking and consciousness. This concept is completely different from the way of thinking and values advocated by Westerners. Americans have always been more inclined to separate the world, using the ideas of division and analysis to divide the universe into two completely different worlds, where heaven and man are different and the two are in opposition. In dealing with things, they are accustomed to analyzing and solving them accurately, paying more attention to logical thinking, and striving to achieve a language perspective of "precision" and "accuracy" in the process of communication.

For Americans, they prefer to stand out from the crowd, be unique and independent, pursue personal creativity while reflecting their unique personality, focus on personal enjoyment, and develop freely. They pursue material satisfaction in this way, and even more so in achieving personal freedom, personal development, and personal progress. Therefore, in the process of communication and interaction between different cultures, they fully reflect their respective cultural tendencies, including the Chinese tendency towards collectivism and the Western tendency towards individual heroism. These two different values also determine the formation of different national personalities.

The "introverted" temperament inherent in Chinese people is seen by Westerners as a "negative" attitude towards life, because for them, they place more emphasis on outward actions and behaviors. They are frank, active, adventurous, and competitive, so when communicating, Westerners often show their sharpness. Chinese people prefer stillness, using stillness to brake and keeping the same to adapt to changes. From the perspective of modern linguistics, language belongs to the category of "movement", which is completely different between the East and the West. Chinese people are good at using nonverbal behavior, namely silence.

There are many differences in the way time is used between Eastern and Western cultures. Chinese people tend to be more casual in dealing with time issues and are also more flexible in specific implementation. However, Americans are often constrained by time. For example, when Chinese teachers are in class, if there is an important topic that has not been fully covered, they often move on to the next lecture, which can be postponed for a period of time. Chinese people tend to be more casual and have more free time when meeting friends, handling affairs, shopping, and other aspects. Americans always make appointments before going on dates. For major gatherings, they often make appointments a month in advance and rarely change their schedules because of differences in time behavior. Interactions between different cultures can often be confusing. When an American friend tells you that they have plans for the next day and refuses your invitation, you must be aware that this is due to different cultural understandings of time behavior.

When the term 'national character' appeared, Li Dazhao once said: Chinese civilization is a peaceful civilization, and this statement is reasonable and reliable. From the values just mentioned, it can be seen that the Chinese people's value orientation is indeed the pursuit of harmony and unity, especially the pursuit of unity between the inner world and the external world. Chinese people love and respect nature, follow the laws of natural development, and rely on each other in interpersonal communication. Confucianism is the essence, which focuses on the essence of human beings, seeks self reflection, emphasizes the inner self, and advocates understanding their nature by looking at their inner selves, thereby achieving the ultimate perfection of personality and the highest level of moral character - the so-called "virtuous person". The Taoist and Buddhist philosophies emphasize the importance of "cultivating oneself and nurturing one's character". Under their influence, Chinese people place greater emphasis on humility, self-discipline, introversion, self-cultivation, and self-improvement.

Under the guidance and influence of Taoist philosophy, Chinese people have formed a special value system, which is "to achieve something without doing anything". Because people do not like conflicts and contradictions, and 'active' often means discord, in order to achieve harmony and unity between people, 'non action' has emerged as a guiding ideology. Only non action can achieve harmony and unity, and avoid conflicts and contradictions. Therefore, most Chinese people are introverted, gentle and tolerant in their daily lives, cautious and reserved, with rich emotions, emphasis on unity, and mutual cooperation. From this perspective, Chinese people value inaction over action, which is what we often say about being a good person rather than doing things. And how to be a good person is the expectation and embodiment of social values. To be a good person, one must first be a good father, mother, husband, son, wife, and daughter. Only then can one make achievements, serve society, and become a moral person. Being proactive "means" moving", and these two values are closely related. Chinese people prefer quietness over movement, especially in exploring and taking risks, which they dislike and are not good at. Although "Yi" has the idea of advocating change, what it seeks is stillness in the midst of change, a circular movement that remains stationary. When it comes to the root of Chinese people's love for stillness, we must mention Laozi, who advocates that stillness is the root of the development of all things.

The ocean of ancient Greece is the origin and foundation of Western culture. The rise of ocean culture has influenced the thinking of Westerners, who strive to conquer and overcome nature. Specifically, in terms of individual development, they strive for the liberation of their personalities, do things that do not conform to conventions, rush to progress, and take risks. Joyful changes and actions guide their thoughts, thus becoming their driving force and spiritual support for struggle. They prefer to "do things" and "achieve something" and put in effort for it.

Exploring adventure and being proactive are highly valued by Westerners. They believe that in Chinese culture, "wuwei" and "xijing" are negative behaviors and manifestations. They believe that continuous progress, adventurous personality, competitive efficiency, quick action, and success are the positive values and qualities. Therefore, people are committed to improving and enhancing their social status, striving to achieve success, and ultimately obtaining money and honor. This value system is obviously very different from the reward concept of "virtue is rewarded" in Chinese culture. At the same time, Americans believe that self suppression in order to be a good person and a moral person is an unethical behavior, and they have already formed a specific cultural value system to make every effort to pursue personal expectations and demands. When it comes to the personality of Americans, most of them are outgoing and have the ability to take action. This personality is rooted in the values of "being proactive" and "doing things". They are straightforward, serious, adventurous, competitive, and free to seek change without relying on others.

4. THE ISSUE OF THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN NATURE IS A KEY FOCUS THAT WE MUST ALWAYS PAY ATTENTION TO

Because every aspect of human life cannot be separated from the direct influence of human nature, starting from goodness, human nature is inherently good, which is emphasized by traditional Confucianism. Maintaining our original intention and treating others with kindness is our ultimate goal. This makes Chinese people like to be "content with the status quo", try their best to "abide by their own rules", and advocate "contentment brings happiness". Emphasize the value orientation of "benevolence and tranquility". In Chinese culture, Chinese people are often influenced by others, for example, those who are close to vermilion are red and those who are close to ink are black. The value orientation of others often affects their own value orientation, and Chinese people also like to act according to others' faces and situations. In daily communication, if the impression left on others is bad, they often feel embarrassed and even ashamed of it. However, Western culture is rooted in the culture of original sin, which is innate. People strive to change their original sin by constantly praying and repenting, in order to find ways to change their sinful nature, strive to change reality, transcend the present, pursue change, and ultimately face the judgment of the end of the world, in order to transcend this world and reach the other side of the ideal of happiness. The Western mentality of seeking change and action is rooted in this. Many Western scholars also believe that the "culture of guilt" originates from Western culture, which is the "doctrine of original sin" in religion. People believe and feel that life in this world is painful, sinful, and therefore sinful before God. Every day in the real world is a redemption. When people from different cultures communicate, it is particularly important to understand and be familiar with the cultural definitions, orientations, and values of different countries in order to achieve cultural identity, avoid excessive communication errors, and prevent the use of existing cultural norms and standards to explain and predict others' behavior. This also helps us predict the behavior patterns of people from different cultural backgrounds in cross-cultural communication, so as to find appropriate language and behavior for reasonable communication.

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