

THE INFLUENCE OF CHINESE CORE CULTURAL VALUES ON THE COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOUR OF OVERSEAS CHINESE STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study is based on three dimensions of Hofstede's framework, which are power distance, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (1980) considers the Chinese culture to be characterized by high power distance, medium masculinity and weak uncertainty avoidance. For this reason, this study explores the impact of Chinese core cultural values on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English. A questionnaire was used as a technique to collect data about the topic from fifty overseas Chinese students at Newcastle upon Tyne and Northumbria Universities. This study agreed with Hofstede in the dimension of power distance; however, it found different results in masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Thus, Chinese students are highly influenced by power distance in their relationship with staff. In uncertainty avoidance the students scored medium level in their response to the questionnaire. Masculinity affected students only in achievement, but in gender role it was very weak. Therefore, the Chinese culture in this study is characterized by high power distance, medium uncertainty avoidance and weak masculinity.

Keywords: *communication behaviours, Chinese culture, power distance, femininity/masculinity, uncertainty avoidance.*

Introduction

For anthropologists, culture is the umbrella which covers all the patterns of our social activities and has a serious influence on our behaviour, communication, relationships and other social aspects. Therefore, there are various studies of different cultures which investigate the influence of core cultural values and beliefs on social attitudes. In spite of the fact that there are many studies about the Chinese culture, just a few studies consider the influence of culture on the communication behaviour of Chinese learners of English.

Definition of culture

Culture is a word which covers various areas in our life and, consequently, it has been defined by anthropologists in different ways. Hall (1969, p.20) defines culture as, “the way of life of a people. It is the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, attitudes, and material things”. He also considers culture not to be innate, but learned. Culture is a code we learn and share; this learning and sharing requires communication (Smith 1966). Thus, there are many studies which investigate the influence of culture on different patterns of our life, such as communication, behaviour, learning and other activities.

Definition of communication

Since every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication, it is widely studied as the means of transmitting ideas and as part of culture. Therefore, many theories provide various approaches to facilitate communication between different discourse systems, for instance, the approach of

increasing shared knowledge, which aims to collect cultural information about the people who communicate with each other. In addition, it deals with the miscommunication approach, which considers misunderstanding to be prevalent in professional communication (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

Jandt (2003, p.38) says that the philosophy of Confucius defines communication as, “an infinite interpretive process where all parties are searching to develop and maintain a social relationship”. Consequently, many Asian anthropologists define communication with the emphasis on harmony. Thus, the Chinese have developed many verbal communication strategies, such as compliments and greeting rituals, to maintain interpersonal relations (Hofstede 1997).

Learning as communication behaviour

According to Wesley, (1992) learning can be separated into three traditional domains, namely cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling), and psychomotor (behaviour). In classrooms where there is face-to-face contact, teachers and students develop various strategies and use verbal and nonverbal communication to express themselves in different learning situations. In the case of different cultural backgrounds, both teacher and student need to learn about each other’s cultural aspects to avoid misunderstanding. In Chinese culture, the use of nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, facial expressions and gestures in learning, sometimes expresses meanings which are different from those in British culture (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

For instance, Chinese students are more likely to avoid eye contact with teachers when they cannot answer a question, while western teachers will often feel

this means that students are ignoring them. In addition, Chinese students are used to smiling when they fail to answer questions, which may be misunderstood by their teachers in the UK (Scollon and Scollon 2001). Furthermore, in discussion groups the Chinese students do not always use expressions such as, “of course”, “yeah” or nod their heads when they respond to other students or teachers in the debates, which may be interpreted as disagreement with others (Jandt 2003).

Chinese culture

Chinese culture is one which has deep roots in history and its own characteristics. It is strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy, which believes in harmony in society through respect to age and social hierarchy (Jandt 2003). Moreover, Chinese students are more likely to accept status differences as legitimate (Walker 1996). Therefore, Chinese people tend not to say what they really mean if they think it might hurt others in the group.

According to Yum (1988), Confucianism has many different effects on Chinese interpersonal communication. For example, the Chinese have particular rules which govern interaction with their elders or with those whose status is known. The relationships between members of the same group are characterized by harmony, whereas they may find it harder to establish personal relationships with members of other groups (Scollon and Scollon 1994). In addition, Hofstede (1980) studied cultural differences in fifty-three countries in the IPM Company, which developed a framework consisting of four cultural dimensions to measure cultures, known as the cultural map. In this study, Chinese culture, like Confucian culture, is characterized by high power distance, medium masculinity and weak uncertainty avoidance.

However, Chu and Ju (1993) developed a survey on the influence of traditional Confucian values in Chinese society. They found a change in Chinese cultural values, especially in the masculine role, and harmony and tolerance no longer existed strongly. All these aspects influence the communication behaviour of Chinese students; this is investigated with more detail in this empirical study.

Chinese culture and learning

Culture is a collection of values, attitudes and beliefs that a group of people hold, it manifests in their behaviour when they are interacting with each other or with people from other cultures. Many studies, such as Ryan (2003), Ho (2004) and Fat (2004) have explained the influence of Chinese cultural values on patterns of thinking, communication behaviour and the use of English as a second language among learners.

Due to the influence of Confucianism in Chinese culture, Bond (1996) argues that the Chinese consider the teacher to be the wisest and most knowledgeable person and s/he is expected to have moral character. The Chinese believe knowledge leads to a meaningful life and that the more facts people know, the more highly they are regarded by society. Therefore, in China, every level of schooling emphasises learning by rote a considerable number of facts related to the oral cultural tradition of the Mandarin language (Jandt 2003).

The communication behaviour of Chinese students is influenced by some cultural aspects, such as harmony, social hierarchy and compliance (Walker 1996). Moreover, Scollon and Scollon (2001) investigated the relationship between students and teachers according to Confucian philosophy, and they found that students show a

high respect to teachers by using titles, forms and following instructions. Furthermore, Nelson (1995) considers that the Chinese learning style is influenced by some aspects of Confucianism. Chinese students believe that the most important part of a teacher's job is to provide them with the knowledge and facts to pass examinations. Thus, they claim that the teacher has not taught them enough when they fail exams (Stephens 1997). All these authors found that the core cultural values have a serious influence on the communication behaviour in the learning style of Chinese students.

Kennedy (2002) also investigated the influence of culture on the Chinese learning style among adult learners. He argues that, for many Chinese teachers and students, books are the main source of knowledge, and that Chinese learners are more reflective than impulsive with a low level of tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, Chinese students are more likely to be interested in the structured approach, which is emphasised in this empirical study. In addition, another study by Chen (1996) examines the experience of Chinese youth adjusting to Canadian education and their academic performance in Canadian schools. This study found that Chinese students adjusted easily to the Canadian educational system, which lead to high academic achievement.

In writing skills, there are many studies such as Huang (1995), Kirkpatrick (1997), and Chen and Sanchez (2001) which argue that the Chinese academic writing structure is different to that used in the west, with the addition of some grammatical rules, such as compounds and sentence structures. As a result, Chinese students are influenced by Chinese grammatical rules and the Chinese academic writing style when writing in English.

However, a recent study by Jones (2005) is a critical thinking task from the perspective of Chinese and other overseas students. This study found that, although there were cultural and linguistic differences, critical thinking was very similar among Chinese and non-Chinese students. This means that in some learning situations, it is important to consider cultural differences when presenting information or tasks.

Most of these studies consider the influence of culture on the learning style of Chinese students. Moreover, they agree that the Chinese culture has a serious impact on learning and communication behaviour in the classroom. However, the studies about the influence of core cultural values on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English are very limited; therefore, this study concentrates on this field.

Critiques of Hofstede's work

As with many studies of culture, Hofstede's work has various weaknesses. First of all, as Leat and El-Kot (2007) claim, Hofstede generalised his results in some cases, such as to all Arabic countries. Moreover, Hofstede considered the attitudes of his samples as the main elements in judging their cultures. However, many cultures have a diverse and wide range of cultural groups, ranging from dominant to subordinate social groups, including many of the countries where the study was conducted (Mead 1998).

Moreover, Hofstede studied only one industry, the computer industry, and the single multinational company IBM. In many of the countries examined, the values of IBM employees typically represent only a small group, who are educated, middle class and live in cities (Mead 1998). Furthermore, the study by Hofstede faced various

technical problems in terms of the changing attitudes of the participants. For instance, in large power distance cultures, powerful people may pretend to be less powerful than they are. In addition, in masculine cultures men are supposed to be assertive, ambitious, and tough, but they appeared to be more understanding and accepting of the role of women in the organisations (Hofstede 1997).

Finally, in terms of historical development and the strong influence globalization and secularisation now has in many societies, the IBM study has become out of date (Kirkman *et al.* 2006). This may be due to cultural changes throughout the world and in developing countries in particular. Hofstede (2001) also considers that cultural change over time is an essential element which might invalidate scores on these indices in the national cultural context. Kennedy (2002) conducted a study of similar cultural dimensions, including power distance, in 62 countries and he found that power distance in Malaysia has much less influence compared to the Hofstede's (1980) findings.

Overview of the research

This study investigates the influence of Chinese culture on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English. It addresses the topic in one main question and three sub-questions, and analyses the influence of culture on the communication behaviour of Chinese students, according to Hofstede's dimensions. Thus, the main question is:

How do Chinese core cultural values influence the communication behaviour of overseas Chinese students learning English at Northumbria and Newcastle Upon Tyne Universities?

The sub-questions about three of Hofstede's models are as follows:

- *How do power distance dimensions in Chinese culture affect the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English?*
- *How does uncertainty avoidance in Chinese culture influence the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English?*
- *How does masculinity in the Chinese culture affect the communication behaviour of Chinese Students learning English?*

Therefore, these questions cover the influence of culture on the communication behaviour of Chinese students in areas such as learning and the relationship between teachers and students, according to Hofstede's models.

The characteristics of the samples

Since the topic of research is the influence of the Chinese culture on the communication behaviour among Chinese students learning English, the samples are of overseas Chinese students from mainland China divided equally into two groups of twenty-five male, and twenty-five female candidates. The members of both groups are aged between seventeen and thirty-six. All the participants in this study are students from different stages, postgraduates and undergraduates, who are in the first, second, third and fourth year at university. The case study took place at Northumbria University and Newcastle University in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. A questionnaire was distributed as a hard copy randomly among fifty students at both universities.

Procedure of data collection

The study considers the questionnaire as a technique to collect data and is presented as appendix A. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather data from overseas Chinese students regarding the influence of culture on communication behaviour when learning English. A questionnaire was chosen as a technique because it provides a large amount of data on the area of investigation and also saves time. In designing questionnaires, the clarity of the questions and its interpretations are important for reliability. Munn and Driver (1990, p. 4) claim one of the advantages of the questionnaire is that, “it can be designed in standardized questions”. Nunan (1992, p. 143) also reports that,

A questionnaire is a relatively popular, and an attractive means of collecting data. It enables the researchers to collect data in field settings, and the data itself is more amenable to quantification than discursive data such as free-form fields, participant observers’ journal, and the transcripts of oral language.

Therefore, a questionnaire is more objective compared to other methods, because the results can be counted without any interpretation, unlike interviews or observations. Questionnaires can give more reliable information because the candidates feel more independent when answering the questions.

In addition, with questionnaires the researcher can investigate a considerable number of participants, which reduces limitations and gives reliable information about the issue. According to Baxter *et al.* (2001), in face-to-face surveys, the responses of the participants are more serious and reliable compared to sending copies via email or post. Thus, printed copies of the questionnaire were personally distributed as hard copies among the candidates. Moreover, there are several types of questions in questionnaires, such as list, category, ranking, scale, quantity, frequency and grid questions (Youngman 1986). In addition, as Cohen *et al.* (2000, p. 253) point out:

Rating scale is powerful and useful in the research, in that the degree of response, intensity of response and a move away from dichotomous questions can be noticed in rating scale.

Therefore, in this study the scale question type was adopted, and the questions were divided into thirteen questions according to the areas of research. The questionnaire was focused on gathering information from the students about the influence of culture on communication behaviour when in different learning situations. The same numbers of degrees of scale were used in each question, to make it easy for students to choose and for the researchers to analyze data.

On the other hand, questionnaires are unreliable because researchers cannot understand the reasons behind choosing one option of the answers' set in scale question type and also the interpretations of the question will be different from one participant to another. Although any questionnaire has limitations and weaknesses, in this questionnaire the researcher tried to avoid the shortcomings of this technique. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed among some students to ensure that the questionnaire addresses the topic. In addition, the participants were asked to give brief details of their reasons for choosing one option over another, which provided more data. After that, all the responses of the participants were collected, which gave expected amounts of data about the issue. Finally, the collected data was compared to the results of other similar studies. Although this research adopted questionnaires as a technique for collecting data, it considered a qualitative approach in analysing results. Furthermore, it illustrated the information on figures. Each figure includes explanations and interpretations of the meaning of the data and its location.

The main findings

Power distance

In brief, this index refers to inequalities in the distribution of power among the members of society. Hofstede (1997, p. 28) defines power distance as

The extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.

According to this definition, Hofstede considers the Chinese culture to be characterized by high power distance. This study also found that the index of power distance has a serious influence on the communication behaviour of Chinese students towards teachers when learning English.

Figure 1 shows the response to Question 4, which asks, “Do you address teachers in a formal way in the UK, such as Sir, Madam, Dr, Mr and other forms, instead of using just first names?”. About 60% of students said that they “always” or “usually” use formal titles to address teachers in the UK. 28% of students are undecided and around 12% rarely or never use them.

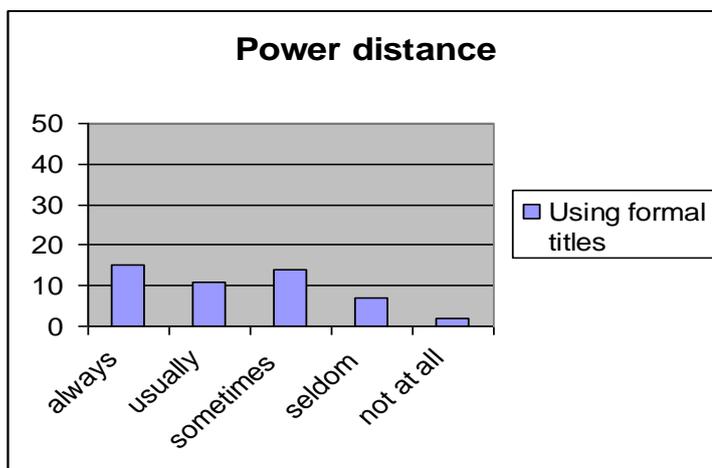


Figure 1 Question 4 response

According to social hierarchy in Chinese culture, school teachers are usually regarded as having high status and responsibility. As a result, they should be respected and obeyed by their subordinates in the school, which produces formal relationships (Jandt 2003). Although these Chinese students are studying in the UK, the response to this question shows that they are highly influenced by their own culture in regards to teaching staff.

This may be due to Confucian philosophy, which states that the more knowledge the person has, the more s/he is respected in society (Hofstede 1997). Moreover, Chinese people raise their children to have obedience and respect for elderly people and those who have high status (Jandt 2003). Thus, Chinese students believe that the teacher should be revered and admired because s/he has knowledge, deliver wisdom and can help them to overcome their learning problems (Hofstede 2000). Therefore, as passive receivers of knowledge in Chinese culture it is necessary to show high obedience and submission to teachers (Song 1995).

Even those who said “sometimes”, “seldom” or “not at all” may have said so because some teaching staff in the UK do not like to be addressed by formal titles. Chen (1996) says that Chinese students adjust easily to the western educational system and culture. Furthermore, one of the students reported that, “*It depends on the teachers whether they help and encourage students to overcome their problems or not*”. This suggests, as Kennedy (2002) claims, which Chinese students believe that teachers should be able to support them in learning situations and they respect them only when they play their role perfectly. This also supports Nelson (1995), who argues that Chinese students blame their teachers when they cannot pass exams.

In general, since the teacher has a great amount of knowledge and delivers wisdom, s/he is respected, it is expected that her/his subordinates will obey her/him. This affects the communication behaviour and the relationship between teachers and students (Scollon and Scollon 2001). Furthermore, this also supports the idea that culture affects communication behaviour, way of thinking and other social activities. Thus, the response to this question illustrates that the communication behaviour of Chinese students is influenced by power distance in their culture.

Masculinity versus femininity

According to Hofstede (1980), this term refers to gender role in society and the way society deals with its gender divisions. Related to learning, this dimension has a serious influence on the communication behaviour of Chinese students, creating intense competition among students in terms of academic achievement. Cohen (1973) believes that in masculine cultures the achievement of students is very important and failing in school is unacceptable. Therefore, the students in such societies challenge each other openly to show their strength and ability for achievement (Hofstede 2003).

In respect of the importance of achievement for Chinese students in this study, the Chinese culture has a high level of masculinity. Question 11 asks, “Do you often consider that higher achievement in your studies is very important for your social life, such as with yourself or your parents?” Chinese students scored a high level for masculinity in both parts of the question, as shown in the following figure:

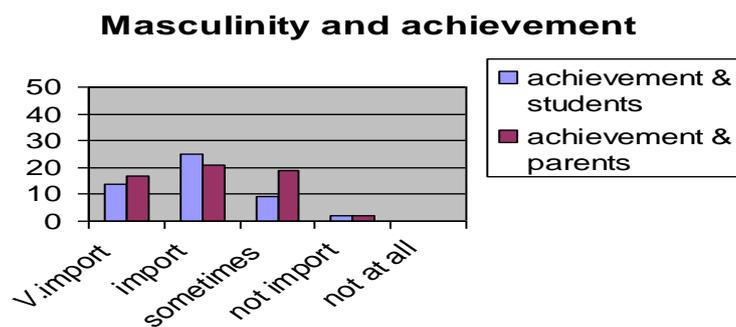


Figure 2 Question 11 responses

Figure 2 illustrates that 78% of students said that higher achievement is “very important” or “important” for their social life. On the other hand 18% are in the middle and just 4% say that it is “not important”. Moreover, as can also be seen in Figure 2, in the second part of the question, which investigates the importance of achievement for parents, the influence of masculinity is very high. Thus, about 76% of students agreed with the question and said their achievement is important for their parents. At the same time about 20% were in the middle and just 4% disagreed with the question.

From this response it can be inferred that Chinese students are influenced by masculinity in both parts of the question, perhaps because of the influence of Confucian philosophy in their culture. This philosophy emphasises different principles, such as admiring and respecting one who has more knowledge than others in society and creating a meaningful life through knowledge. Therefore students feel the same level of responsibility in achievement towards themselves and their parents. These aspects increase competition among Chinese students, which affects communication behaviour strategies in English learning among Chinese students.

Moreover, the high expectation of teachers is another serious influence on the achievement of Chinese learners at different stages (Jones 2005). In Chinese culture

the best students memorize a lot of facts and often volunteer to answer questions in class, so it is normal for them to learn large amounts of English vocabulary during their courses. They are also more likely to ask questions after class, possibly to maintain harmony and avoid embarrassment or to prevent others from benefiting from the answers (Cortazzi and Jin 2001).

Question 10 asks, “How do you feel when you fail to answer a question in a learning situation?” Many students say that they feel very embarrassed; this may be due to the role of masculinity in achievement. In the Chinese culture, the successful student is the one who can answer teachers’ questions and perform at a high level compared to other students (Bond 1996). According to Scollon and Scollon (1994), Chinese students treat such situations with different kinds of communication behaviour, which shows the influence of masculinity in learning. For instance, they usually avoid eye contact with teachers when they do not know the answer to a question. They are also more likely to smile when they fail to answer a question, which may be misinterpreted by British teachers.

Furthermore, at the end of every academic year in China, Chinese students vote for the best student according to three principles: moral behaviour, intellectual achievement and participation in physical activities (Waxier and Hanwei 2004). From these criteria, Chinese students adopt their own strategies in communication behaviours with teachers and classmates. They are more likely to show their ability, strength and competence in various activities and learning situations in order to achieve the status of best student. Consequently, all these policies have a serious influence on masculinity and achievement in Chinese educational culture.

In general, admiration shown towards teachers, who are expected to be perfect in their academic and social lives, plays a great role with regard to high achievement among Chinese students. Furthermore, the importance of education in the work-place may also increase competition, which affects masculine values in the educational sector (Jandt 2003). In addition, it is argued that the one-child policy in China has a serious influence on the achievement of students in schools. Thus, Chinese students believe that they are responsible for high achievement for themselves and for their families, which may have led to the similarities in the results of both parts of Question 11. Finally, all those notions strongly affect the strategies of communication behaviour among Chinese students learning English, which distinguishes them from other nationalities.

However, the impact of masculinity on the communication behaviours of students learning English regarding the gender role is found to be very weak. Question 1 asks, “Would you feel freer to learn in a single sex group than in a mixed one?” The students’ responses show 62% of candidates disagree with the question. In contrast, just 18% of candidates agreed and 20% were undecided.

Moreover, Question 2 asks, “Do you agree that the gender of a teacher has an influence on your participation in learning English?”. In response to this question, about 30% of the students agreed and almost 34%, disagreed with the question. However, the majority of students were undecided, as can be seen in Figure 3.

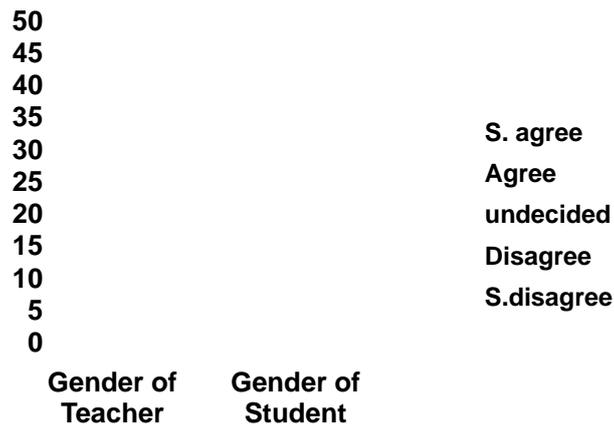


Figure 3 Teachers influence on students participation in learning English

In response to these questions, most students consider the gender group and the gender of the teacher not to be important and believe that gender does not make any difference to the learning situation. Furthermore, one of the female participants reported that she prefers “to be in mixed-sex classrooms, to know how the opposite sex express themselves in learning situations”. This may be due to the abundance of women in the education sector, present as both students and teachers. For instance, Chinese students are used to studying in mixed-sex classrooms from the early stages of education, and it is very common to be taught by female teachers (Chu and Ju 1993). This, in addition to the cultural changes taking place in the country, has allowed China to absorb many positive aspects of other cultures, with an open and tolerant attitude towards cultural diversity, which affects the cultural values of Chinese society (Lu 2003).

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is related to the extent to which people in a culture respond differently to unknown social situations (Hofstede 1980). In high uncertainty avoidance cultures this reaction is more likely to be with nerves, stress and unpredictability, which sometimes leads to disruption and psychological disturbances.

From the notions of tolerance and ambiguity, this term has a serious influence on the behaviour of students in schools. Question 9 asks, “Do you always expect a teacher to have correct answers to your questions in a learning situation?” The figure shows that 66% of students agreed with the question and 28% are in the middle. However, just 6% of students disagreed with the question. The figure is as follows:

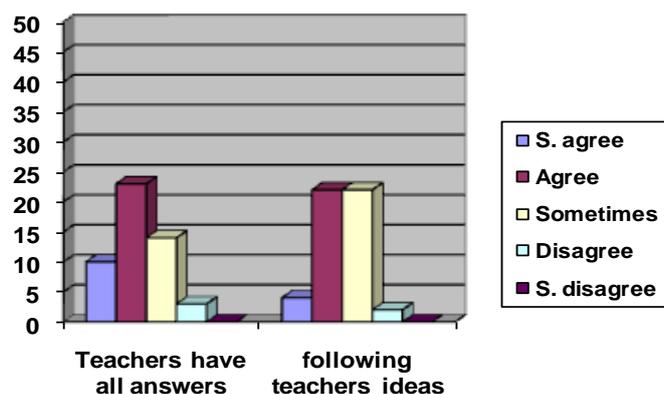


Figure 4 students expectation of teachers’ correct answers to their questions in a learning situation

In high uncertainty avoidance countries, teachers are expected to have the answers and refuse any deviant ideas or behaviour from students in the classroom (Strobe 1976). Therefore, in line to Strobe’s findings, this study found that Chinese culture has high uncertainty avoidance, which is completely different from the

classification of Hofstede. This may be because Hofstede applied his dimensions in a business context and this study was applied to the communication behaviour of students learning English. It may also be related to the influence of Confucian philosophy, which considers the educated person to be one who memorizes large numbers of facts. Thus, Chinese students consider teachers to be knowledgeable people who are able to deliver wisdom (Chen and Sanchez 2001).

Question 12 asks, “Do you usually follow the teachers’ ideas or do you come up with different ideas in the classroom learning situation?”. As figure 4 illustrates, 52% of students agreed that they always or usually follow the teachers’ ideas and 44% say they sometimes do. However, just 4% said that they rarely follow the teachers’ ideas, which means that the communication behaviour of Chinese students is influenced by their own culture.

In referring to the definition of communication, Confucian philosophy considers the aim of communication to be maintaining harmony and building social relationships. These cultural aspects encourage students to follow the teachers’ ideas and instructions. As a result, Chinese students think it is rude to interrupt teachers with different questions in the classroom. Moreover, teachers cannot admit that they do not know the answers to students’ questions (Jandt 2003).

In addition, in response to questions about introversion in a learning situation, most students consider themselves to be introverted when learning English. This was also noticed by Kennedy (2002), who argues that Chinese students are more likely to be reflective than impulsive in a learning situation. This may be because they need to keep harmony and balance with their classmates and teachers in a learning situation. Thus, the Chinese language has various communication strategies, such as greetings

and compliments, to maintain balance in interpersonal relationships (Jandt 2003). For example, Chinese students avoid objecting to others' opinions in group discussions and they do not say anything that may hurt others in conversation or arguments (Scollon and Scollon 2001).

Therefore, in response to Question 3, which asks, "Do you think you learn better with a structured approach rather than one you have experienced in the UK?" Chinese students claim to prefer a more structure approach to the approach used in the UK, because it helps them to understand what they should do in different learning situations. This is also emphasised by Kennedy (2002), who says that Chinese students and teachers believe that books are the main source of knowledge, as books avoid ambiguity and uncertainty. Thus, Chinese students are also more likely to give only the right answers, as they rarely guess when answering questions to avoid being wrong and feeling embarrassed (Bond 1996).

General findings

This study and previous studies agree that culture has a serious influence on different patterns of behaviour, thinking, communication and learning styles. Thus, people from different cultural backgrounds understand discourse differently, according to their culture and mother tongue (Chen and Sanchez 2001). Correspondingly, many students in this study agreed that they are more likely to be faced with problems in understanding colloquial languages because most of these expressions seem to be cultural idioms rather than part of the standard language.

Question 6 asks, "Do you agree with the concept that you sometimes use the ways of learning your own language when learning English, such as in grammar and

pronunciation?” Most Chinese students disagreed that their language affected the learning of English pronunciation. However, Question 5 asks “Do you agree that Chinese students have a different accent when they speak English compared to other international students?”. Many Chinese students consider themselves as having different accents when speaking English. Therefore, Chinese students may be affected by their core cultural values when practising English pronunciation. In other words, they may not be able to practise English in the class with teachers, because of power distance, masculinity or uncertainty avoidance.

This study found that most Chinese students are influenced by Chinese grammar rules when learning English grammar. This supports previous studies by Kirkpatrick (1997) and Chen and Sanchez (2001), who argue that Chinese academic writing and some compound structures are similar to those used in English.

Hofstede considers Chinese culture, like other cultures dominated by Confucian philosophy, to be characterized by a high level of power distance, medium masculinity and weak uncertainty avoidance. However, this study found that the influence of Chinese core cultural values on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English to differ from Hofstede’s findings. As can be seen in Figure 5, the power distance has a high influence on the communication behaviour of Chinese students, which is estimated to be 60%. The uncertainty avoidance is medium at about 54%. Masculinity is found to have a weak impact, at just 49%.

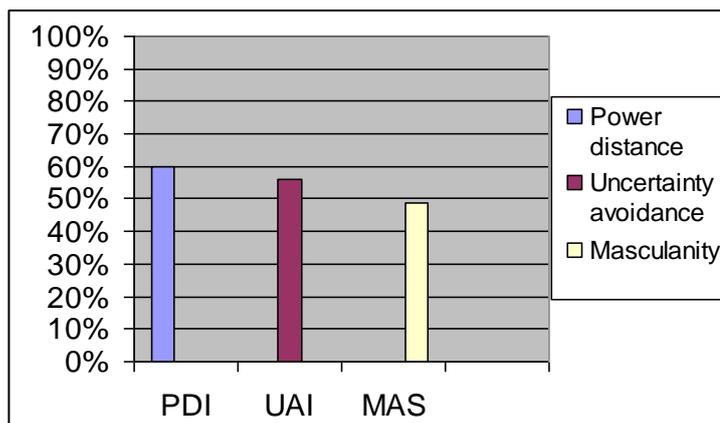


Figure 5 power distance influence on the communication behaviour of Chinese students

This may be because Hofstede applied his models in a business context and this study considers the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English. In addition, there is a study by Chu and Ju (1993) which says that some Chinese cultural values are not strongly present in Chinese culture anymore. They think that the gender role has changed, especially the relationship between men and women in their society, which may also be related to cultural change over time in different societies.

Conclusion

This research supports many previous studies examining the influence of culture on different patterns of behaviour. Although, this study does not completely agree with Hofstede's classification of Chinese culture in his examined dimensions, in which he classified Chinese culture as having medium masculinity and weak uncertainty avoidance, it shows similar results for the power distance dimension. According to the sampled population of overseas Chinese students, this study reveals that Chinese culture has a high power distance (about 60%), medium uncertainty avoidance (about 54%) and weak masculinity, (about 49%).

Therefore, in terms of power distance, this study found that most students do not call teachers by their first names because they are used to using formal titles to address them in their home country. Moreover, masculinity has two different effects on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English. In gender roles questions, such as mixed-sex classes or different sexes of teacher, this value has a very weak impact, which may be related to cultural changes in Chinese society or the influence of the environment, as the sampled students live in the UK. However, in the importance of achievement questions, the Chinese students were highly influenced by masculinity. In the index of uncertainty avoidance, this study disagreed with the classification of Hofstede, who classified this dimension as being weak. Chinese students, in terms of questions asked to teachers, believe teachers have all the answers and Chinese students tend to follow their ideas, both of which suggest they are influenced by medium uncertainty avoidance.

Thus, what appears to be the case in this study is that the communication behaviour of Chinese students is influenced by their own culture. As a result, they have their own way of communicating within their own groups and in treating teachers. In further consideration, it is very important to explore the influence of culture on the communication behaviour of Chinese students in learning situations. This may help teaching staff to create the appropriate atmosphere for international students and minimize the gap between cultures. As with many studies, in spite of the fact that all questionnaires were returned, the results cannot be generalized to all Chinese overseas students. In addition, some students gave unexpected answers which may represent their opinions rather than the influence of culture. In general, although limited for reasons of length, this study has provided a great amount of knowledge

about Chinese core cultural values and their influence on the communication behaviour of Chinese students learning English.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Please circle where appropriate:

Gender: male female

Age: 17 – 20 21 – 24 25 – 30 31- 35 36+

Year of study: first year second year third year fourth year

Please tick the appropriate box for the following questions and write a brief comment on your answer if possible, in the space under each question.

1- Would you feel freer to learn in a single sex group than in a mixed one?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>

2- Do you agree that the gender of a teacher has its influence on your participation in learning English?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>

3- Do you think you learn better with a structured approach rather than one you have experienced in the UK?

<i>Always</i>	<i>usually</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>rarely</i>	<i>I do not do better at all</i>

4- Do you address teachers in a formal way such as, Sir, Madam, Dr, Mr and other forms instead of just their first names in the UK?

<i>Always</i>	<i>usually</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Not at all</i>

5- Do you agree that Chinese student have a different accent when they speak English compared to other international students?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>undecided</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>

.....

6- Do you agree with the concept that you sometimes use the ways of leaning your own language, when learning English? Such as in:

a) Grammar:

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	Strongly disagree

.....

b) Pronunciation:

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	Strongly disagree

.....

7- Would you consider yourself to be an introvert in learning English?

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>undecided</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>strongly disagree</i>

.....

8- How often do you face problems in understanding colloquial language?

<i>Very often</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>rarely happens</i>	<i>does not happen</i>

.....

9- Do you always expect a teacher to have correct answers to your questions in a learning situation?

<i>Always</i>	<i>usually</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>seldom</i>	<i>Not at all</i>

.....

10- How do you feel when you fail to answer a question in a learning situation?

<i>Very embarrassed</i>	<i>embarrassed</i>	<i>Somehow embarrassed</i>	<i>normal</i>	<i>Not embarrassed at all</i>

.....

11- Do you often consider your higher achievement in your studies is very important for your social life? Such as, with:

a) Your self:

<i>Very important</i>	<i>important</i>	<i>sometimes important</i>	<i>not important</i>	<i>not important at all</i>

.....

b) Your parents:

<i>Very important</i>	<i>important</i>	<i>sometimes important</i>	<i>not important</i>	<i>not important at all</i>

.....

12- Do you usually follow teachers' ideas or you can come up with different ideas in the classroom learning situation?

<i>Always follow</i>	<i>usually follow</i>	<i>sometimes follow</i>	<i>rarely follow</i>	<i>I do not follow at all</i>

.....

13- Do you consider the teacher is the person who you should respect like your parents?

<i>Very likely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>Unlikely at all</i>

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About the author:

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However, the Chinese sense of cultural superiority led the country to isolate itself further. As the Western and Eastern worlds advanced trade and began to globalise, China continued to be a secluded and conservative country into the 20th century.Â This regime was known to deny the traditional values of Chinese culture and embrace a new set of values and beliefs. Life was largely contained to the countryâ€™s borders with a closed economy (until 1978) and closed borders (until 1974).Â Traditional Chinese courtesy rests on the lifelong hierarchical relationships reflected in Confucian ideology. These relationships are already clear, meaning that the Chinese do not feel the need for constant verbal reinforcement through courtesy words like â€˜please,â€™ â€˜thank youâ€™ and â€˜excuse meâ€™.