

Conflicts and Coordination of Sino-US Communication Differences in International Trade Negotiations

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Abstract. In the backdrop of economic globalization, the trade cooperation between China and the United States exerts a profound influence on the global economic landscape. This thesis zeroes in on the communication disparities in the international trade negotiations between China and the United States. It delves into classic theories, such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Hall's High-Low Context Culture Theory. Employing the methodologies of literature review and case analysis, this thesis systematically examines the underlying causes of these differences in Sino-US negotiations, their external manifestations, as well as the strategies for alleviating and averting potential conflicts. The findings of this research indicate that notable discrepancies exist between China and the United States in trade negotiations, encompassing aspects of linguistic expression, body language, and cultural values. Nevertheless, these disparities do not serve as insurmountable barriers to the negotiation process. The crux of the matter lies in the identification of common interests, the adjustment of behavioral patterns, and the achievement of cooperation, all of which are conducive to the promotion of Sino-US trade cooperation and the reduction of conflicts.

Keywords: Sino-US Communication Differences, Cross-Cultural Negotiation, Coordination Strategies, International Trade.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the trends of economic globalization and world multi-polarization have been continuously developing, and the exchanges and trade among countries have become increasingly frequent. As the world's two largest economies, China and the United States, their exchanges and cooperation play a crucial role in the development of global politics and economy. International trade negotiation, as a key part of the business communication between the two sides, not only involves the game of economic interests but also reflects the differences in communication styles under different cultural backgrounds. In-depth research on the conflicts and coordination of communication differences between China and the United States in international trade negotiations is of great practical significance for promoting bilateral trade cooperation, increasing trade exchanges, and improving the efficiency of cooperation.

Scholars at home and abroad have carried out extensive research on cross-cultural communication and international trade negotiations. Abroad, since the cross-cultural research discipline entered the stage of globalization development in the late 20th century, numerous scholars have explored the relationship between cultural differences and business negotiations based on different theoretical frameworks. For example, Geert Hofstede's proposed cultural difference dimensions provide an important perspective for understanding the cultural characteristics of different countries; Edward T. Hall's theory of high-context and low-context cultures reveals the manifestation of cultural differences in the way of information transmission. However, existing research has deficiencies in systematically applying these theories to the specific situations of Sino-US trade negotiations and conducting in-depth analysis in combination with the dynamic evolution of the contemporary international situation.

In China, many scholars have analyzed the impact of cultural differences between China and the West on business negotiations from a macro perspective. However, the in-depth exploration of the specific manifestations, internal mechanisms, and targeted coordination strategies of the conflicts caused by the communication differences between China and the United States in international trade

negotiations is relatively superficial. Especially against the backdrop of the complex and ever-changing Sino-US trade situation, there is an urgent need for a more meticulous and comprehensive analysis of the communication issues in the trade negotiations between the two sides.

This paper mainly focuses on solving the conflicts arising from communication differences between China and the United States in international trade negotiations, and conducts research by comprehensively applying the literature research method and the case analysis method. In terms of literature research, it sorts out the classic theories in the field of cross-cultural research, such as Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, Hall's high-context and low-context culture theory, and Berry's acculturation theory, etc., providing theoretical support for a deep understanding of the cultural differences between China and the United States. At the same time, through a detailed analysis of multiple typical cases, such as the agricultural product trade negotiation between Cargill and COFCO, the technical cooperation negotiation between Qualcomm and Xiaomi, and the film copyright cooperation negotiation between Disney and Huayi Brothers, in combination with the previous literature theories, it deeply explores the communication differences between China and the United States in terms of language expression styles, body language, cultural values, etc., and their specific manifestations in negotiations.

The research objective of this paper is to profoundly reveal the conflict manifestations and internal mechanisms of communication differences between China and the United States in international trade negotiations, and propose practical coordination strategies. Through this research, it aims to help the negotiators of both China and the United States better recognize and understand each other's communication styles, reduce misunderstandings and conflicts caused by communication differences, improve negotiation efficiency, and promote mutual benefit and win-win results in international trade cooperation between the two sides. This not only helps to promote the more stable and efficient development of trade cooperation between enterprises of China and the United States but also contributes new ideas and methods to the theoretical and practical development of the global field of cross-cultural business communication.

2. Literature review

In the 19th century, with the rise of colonial expansion and anthropology, cross-cultural research gradually emerged and became more systematic. In the late 20th century, the discipline of cross-cultural research entered the stage of globalization development.

2.1. Power Distance, Collectivism & Individualism and Long-Term Orientation & Short-Term Orientation

The renowned scholar Geert Hofstede, through a survey of IBM employees worldwide, proposed six dimensions of cultural differences, and three of them will be introduced in this article.

Power distance refers to the extent to which a society accepts and approves of the unequal distribution of power within organizations or institutions [1]. Based on different degrees, various countries can be categorized into societies with high power distance and those with low power distance. In societies with high power distance, power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, with distinct hierarchies and deeply ingrained concepts of social rank. Typical countries in this category include China, Malaysia, etc. In contrast, in countries with low power distance, power is relatively decentralized, and individual equality is emphasized. Representative countries are Denmark, Sweden, the United States, and so on [1].

Collectivism and individualism reflect whether a society places more emphasis on individual goals or group interests. In individualistic cultures, self-actualization and independence are highly valued. Examples of such countries are the United States and Australia. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures attach great importance to family, team harmony, and loyalty. China, Japan, and other countries are typical representatives of collectivistic cultures.

Long-term orientation and short-term orientation reflect a society's attitude towards future planning. Cultures with a long-term orientation focus on frugality, perseverance, and the ability to adapt to changes. For instance, China and Japan embody such cultural characteristics. Cultures with a short-term orientation, however, pay more attention to traditions, social responsibilities, and immediate results. The United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries are examples of those with a short-term orientation culture.

2.2. Theory of High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

Edward T. Hall's research has revealed the deep-seated logic of cultural differences. His theories have not only advanced academic research but also provided practical tools for international communication in the context of globalization.

In high-context cultures, information transmission relies on implicit non-verbal cues, such as body gestures, situations, shared cultural backgrounds, etc., and the language itself conveys relatively less information. Typical countries in this category include China, Japan, Arab countries, and so on. In contrast, in low-context cultures, information is expressed directly and explicitly, relying on the language itself rather than background knowledge. Representative countries are the United States, Germany, and Nordic countries.

2.3. Acculturation Theory

John W. Berry is a renowned cross - cultural psychologist. His research fields cover multiple aspects such as cross - cultural psychology and acculturation, and he enjoys a high reputation in the international psychological community.

The acculturation theory mainly explores the process in which individuals adjust their behaviors, attitudes, and values to adapt to a new cultural environment when groups with different cultural backgrounds come into contact with each other.

3. The Differences in Contemporary Sino-American Cross-Cultural Trade Communication Negotiations

3.1. Language Expression Styles

Americans are generally more direct, concise and explicit in their language expression. They are accustomed to getting straight to the point. In negotiations, they will quickly and clearly expound their views, positions and demands, pursuing efficient communication. In contrast, the Chinese people's language expression is relatively euphemistic and implicit, laying emphasis on the suggestiveness and indirectness of language [3].

3.1.1 Case Study — The Agricultural Product Trade Negotiation between Cargill and COFCO

During the Sino-US agricultural product trade negotiations in 2019, Cargill Inc. and COFCO Corporation held consultations on soybean procurement. The representative of Cargill straightforwardly proposed that COFCO Corporation should increase the soybean procurement volume by 20% within the next quarter and reduce the procurement price by 5% at the same time. In response, the representative of COFCO Corporation replied euphemistically, stating that Cargill had always been an important partner and that the previous cooperation had yielded fruitful results. However, given the complex market environment at present, the increase in soybean procurement volume needed to take into account numerous factors comprehensively. In terms of price, it was closely related to fluctuations in the international soybean market, production costs, etc. COFCO would carefully evaluate the proposal and also hoped that the two sides could jointly explore a solution that was more in line with their mutual interests.

In the negotiation process, Cargill from the United States directly and decisively put forward the demands for procurement volume and price, getting straight to the point. In combination with Hall's

theory of high-context and low-context cultures, the expression style of Americans clearly belongs to the "direct and explicit communication" style of low-context culture. On the other hand, in the face of the other party's demands, COFCO Corporation responded euphemistically. It began with a gentle and polite opening to ease the tense atmosphere that might be caused by the differences, and then elaborated a series of complex factors in detail to explain the reasons. This way of expression reflects the "implicit" language style of high-context culture. In a high-context cultural environment, communication does not solely rely on the words themselves. More information is embedded in the context behind the words, the relationship between the two sides, past cooperation experiences, and so on. Through this euphemistic statement, the representative of COFCO Corporation neither directly rejected Cargill's proposal, thus maintaining the cooperative relationship between the two sides, nor conveyed the complexity and multi-faceted nature of its own decision-making to the other party. It is hoped that Cargill can understand and jointly explore a solution that is more in line with their mutual interests. This case fully reflects the significant differences in language expression styles between China and the United States.

3.2. Body Language

In negotiations, Americans tend to employ rich body language. They frequently use gestures to emphasize key points and assist in expressing their viewpoints. Their eye contact is also frequent and direct, demonstrating confidence and candor [8]. In contrast, the Chinese people's body language is relatively reserved. Gestures are made with smaller amplitudes, and there is relatively less eye contact. They avoid staring directly at the other party for an extended period as a sign of politeness and respect.

3.2.1 Case study — The Technical Cooperation Negotiation between Qualcomm and Xiaomi

During the International Consumer Electronics Show in 2021, Qualcomm and Xiaomi held negotiations on technical cooperation. When the representative of Qualcomm introduced the latest 5G chip technology, he frequently used large - scale gestures. For example, he spread his hands wide to indicate the wide application scenarios of the chip and forcefully tapped the table with his fingers to emphasize technological breakthroughs. He also maintained intense eye contact with the representatives of Xiaomi all the time, showing full confidence. The representatives of Xiaomi, on the other hand, mostly smiled and nodded, occasionally using slight gestures to indicate their understanding of technical points. Their eye contact was brief and they were relatively reserved. Initially, the representative of Qualcomm felt that Xiaomi did not attach enough importance to the technical introduction, while the representatives of Xiaomi felt pressured by Qualcomm's enthusiastic body language. As the negotiation progressed, Xiaomi took the initiative to strengthen eye contact and respond with positive body language, and Qualcomm also appropriately restrained its exaggerated gestures. Eventually, the two sides reached a preliminary intention of technical cooperation.

In this negotiation, the representative of Qualcomm used large - scale gestures and intense eye contact, which is in line with the characteristics of a more direct and outward communication style in low - context cultures. The representatives of Xiaomi mostly smiled and nodded, occasionally using slight gestures to signal, with their behavior being relatively reserved, which is in line with the "implicit" characteristics in high - context cultures.

At the same time, it can be seen that as the negotiation progressed, Xiaomi actively strengthened eye contact and responded with positive body language, and Qualcomm appropriately restrained its exaggerated gestures. This reflects the process of cultural adaptation. After realizing the misunderstandings and discomfort caused by differences in body language, both sides were able to adjust their behavior patterns to adapt to each other's cultural habits, thus promoting the smooth progress of communication and finally reaching a preliminary intention of technical cooperation.

3.3. Cultural Values

Behind the communication differences actually lies the different cultural values of China and the United States. American culture emphasizes individualism, competition, and pragmatism. In negotiations, it pays more attention to maximizing its own interests and pursues short-term economic benefits [2]. Chinese culture, on the other hand, attaches importance to collectivism, harmony, and the establishment of long-term relationships. In negotiations, it not only takes into account economic interests but also focuses on the long-term development of bilateral cooperation and the maintenance of the relationship.

3.3.1 Case Study — The Film Copyright Cooperation Negotiation between Disney and Huayi Brothers

In 2023, Disney and Huayi Brothers engaged in negotiations regarding film copyright cooperation. Disney prioritized the direct economic benefits of copyright sales, aiming to sell copyrights at a high price in a one-time transaction with meticulous contract terms to maximize its short-term interests. Huayi Brothers, conversely, sought to establish a long-term partnership with Disney, intending to collaborate on more film projects in the future while leveraging the introduction of copyrights to drive domestic film industry development and enhance its brand image. Consequently, during the negotiation, Huayi Brothers proposed cooperative intentions such as joint production in addition to price considerations. Disney expressed confusion about Huayi Brothers' 'additional' demands, viewing them as deviating from the core of copyright transactions, while Huayi Brothers perceived Disney as solely focused on immediate interests. As the negotiation deepened, both sides understood each other's positions and values: Disney recognized the potential value of long-term cooperation with Huayi Brothers for expanding the Chinese market, and Huayi Brothers acknowledged Disney's emphasis on economic returns. Ultimately, the two parties reached a comprehensive cooperation agreement.

In this case, Disney's focus on direct economic gains from copyright sales—seeking high-price, one-time transactions with detailed contract terms to ensure maximum short-term interests—exemplifies characteristics of short-term time orientation and typical individualistic cultural values. Huayi Brothers' emphasis on fostering a long-term partnership, future joint film projects, and domestic industry development through copyright introduction reflects long-term time orientation and collectivist cultural traits.

As the negotiation advanced, both parties comprehended each other's positions and cultural values. Disney recognized the strategic value of long-term cooperation with Huayi Brothers for expanding the Chinese market, while Huayi Brothers acknowledged Disney's emphasis on economic interests. This mutual understanding culminated in a comprehensive cooperation agreement, illustrating the process of cultural adaptation. After identifying divergences rooted in cultural differences, the two sides adjusted their attitudes and expectations through communication, actively aligning with each other's cultural values and interest demands. This adaptive process enabled them to forge a mutually acceptable solution, achieving a transformative shift from cultural conflict to integration and fulfilling the collaborative objectives.

4. Strategies for Coordinating Differences and Coping with Conflicts

4.1. Strengthening Cross - Cultural Training and Cultivating Professional International Talents

Behavior is the external manifestation of our cultural values. The root cause of the negotiation conflict is driven by cultural values. The negotiation cases indicate that negotiators from both China and the United States should deeply study each other's culture, history, values, and business customs. Especially in the current era of globalization, cultivating professional international talents is of particular importance.

In terms of training content, it can cover the explanation of cultural theory knowledge, combined with a large number of practical case analyses, integrating theoretical knowledge with practice, so that the trainees can fully understand the subtle role of culture in real - world negotiations [6]. For example, in language communication, American negotiators should understand the implicitness of Chinese language expression and avoid misunderstanding the true intentions of the Chinese side due to their euphemistic expressions. Chinese negotiators, meanwhile, need to be aware of the straightforward language style of the American side and not regard it as rude.

In terms of implementation methods, universities can offer specialized cross - cultural communication courses, allowing students to be exposed to relevant cultural theory knowledge on campus, and increasing opportunities for internships in multinational enterprises and overseas exchanges, so that they can deeply understand the cultural differences between the two sides and understand the cultural principles. Enterprises can regularly organize internal cross - cultural training courses, inviting professional research scholars or people with rich international business experience to teach. Also, they can arrange for employees to conduct on - the - spot investigation and study in the other country, personally experience the local cultural atmosphere, participate in local business activities, enhance their perceptual understanding of the other country's culture.

However, the changes in the external environment such as international relations will affect the ways and means of communication between China and the United States, making the training content time - bound. What's more, the summary of cultural knowledge from textual research and the like is prone to lag behind social evolution, resulting in the theoretical knowledge obtained from training may not be of great help in practice. The world is dynamic, and culture is also constantly evolving. Moreover, this plan cannot guarantee the firm stance of the trained personnel. Once people are infused with new ideas, it is bound to trigger thinking. If their political and cultural stances are not firm enough, there may be a risk of ideological assimilation.

4.2. Seeking Common Interests and Compromise

It is essential to deeply explore the common interests of both sides, reduce unnecessary conflicts, promote cooperation, and achieve a win - win situation. In the field of business trade negotiations, seeking common interests and compromise is the core strategy for reaching cooperation and achieving a win - win outcome [6]. Based on the reverse deduction of the "Prisoner's Dilemma" model in game theory, if both negotiating parties adopt a tough and non - cooperative attitude and only pursue the maximization of their own interests, they will often end up in a lose - lose situation. From the perspective of the theory of win - win cooperation, the two negotiating parties are not in a zero - sum game but there exists a space for common interests. In the cases of Qualcomm and Xiaomi, as well as Disney and Huayi Brothers, the two sides evolved from initial differences to mutual concessions and understanding, actively searched for common ground in interests and solutions acceptable to both sides, and finally reached cooperation, which fully demonstrates the possibility of the existence of a common - interest space and the adaptability and inclusiveness of culture. During negotiations, both sides should recognize the importance of cooperation and achieve a mutually beneficial and win - win situation through compromise and concession.

However, it must be acknowledged that this approach has limitations. For example, when it comes to negotiating political issues between China and the United States, or even matters related to the fundamental national interests, there is absolutely no room for concession. Fundamentally, the essence of this method is to hope that both sides will base themselves on the underlying fundamental interests, grasp the main contradictions, and make appropriate concessions and compromises. Once the bottom line is exceeded, there is no point in further negotiation.

4.3. Introducing Third - Party Mediation or Arbitration

When negotiations reach an impasse and the two parties are unable to resolve conflicts on their own, considering the introduction of a third - party mediation or arbitration institution can be a viable option. The third - party can be an international organization, an industry association, or a professional

mediation body. Endowed with neutrality and professionalism, they are capable of analyzing issues from an objective perspective, proposing reasonable solutions, facilitating communication and cooperation between the two parties, and contributing to the success of negotiations [7]. Taking the soybean procurement negotiation between Cargill and COFCO as an example, if the two sides are deadlocked on key issues such as procurement volume and price, a third - party mediation institution can utilize its professional knowledge to deeply analyze the current supply - demand situation, price trends, and cost composition in the international soybean market. By taking into account the desired objectives of both negotiating parties, it can put forward a procurement volume adjustment plan that balances the interests of both sides.

However, this approach has its limitations. The insertion of a third - party may undermine the trust between the two parties and increase their dependence on external assistance during communication. Moreover, the involvement of a third - party will raise the cooperation costs, and in some cases, the costs may outweigh the benefits.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above research, significant differences exist in Sino-US communication in terms of language expression styles, body language, and cultural values. These differences stem from distinct cultural backgrounds, and the trends of cultural values give rise to the manifestation of such differences. However, another conclusion drawn from the research is that communication differences do not impede the development of Sino-US communication and negotiations. The two negotiating parties need to truly base themselves on fundamental interests, grasp the main contradictions, adjust their own behaviors by understanding the other side, conduct consultations to the greatest extent possible, identify common ground in interests, and thus achieve cooperation.

With the continuous development of economic globalization and the multi-polarization of international relations in the world, the exchanges between China and the United States are on the increase. The significance and purpose of this research lie in enhancing mutual understanding between the people of the two countries, reducing unnecessary conflicts, and promoting exchanges and cooperation between the two countries.

Nevertheless, this paper also has certain limitations. With the continuous development and changes in Sino-US international relations, the conflicts of many real-world factors also restrict the exchanges between the two countries, which cannot be improved by studying the differences in Sino-US communication and negotiations. It is hoped that in the future, we can combine the characteristics of the development of the times, the international relations situation, and other real-world factors to explore specific improvement plans for Sino-US communication and negotiations that are more in line with the development of the international situation.

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