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What Really Matters for Carrying out Successful Cross-Cultural Exchanges: A Comparative Study of Professionals from China and the USA

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Abstract

The present research provides data showing what aspects professionals in the USA and China may consider important in conducting successful cross-cultural interactions. Although the issue at hand has beenstudied previously, the inclusion of professionals as a sample is unusual, hence this study can be used as a basis for other studies which manipulate features of the inter-cultural professional and see how he/she is regarded and treated. The assumptions leading to this investigation were that Chinese professionals would differ from those from the USA in considering education as well as appearance to be more important than aspects related to attitude, which were thought to be more important for USA professionals. Results show that more Chinese professionals give greaterimportance to more aspects related to appearance than to education and attitude while professionals from the USA rated more aspects related to education and attitude as very important.Except for Sociability, English level and age, which were considered very important, Chinese respondents consider all other aspects important, while respondents from the USA have more diverse opinions (See table 2 and table 3). The Chinese respondents considered 100% of the total criteria important or very important. More respondents from the USA than from China considered more aspects to be very important. Professionals from the USA were more diverse in their opinionof the level of importance of each variable, but at the same time they show to be more cohesive as a group than the Chinese. It is important to notethat most of the variables forming the final criteria were provided by professionals from the USA, and that such criteria was more widely embraced by the Chinese as important or very important than by those from the USA.

Keywords: cross-cultural interaction, conflict, education and skills, physical aspects, attitude

1. Introduction

Comparative studies in the area of cross-cultural interactions are important because they may help us to predict behavior, be better prepared for first time interactions, avoid unintended mistakes, and solve conflicts with less stress than when comparative data is not available to the parties involved.

With the opening of China, globalization is now a more latent reality than it was a decade ago. Even though China's relationship with the world is almost as ancient as China itself, it remained closed to the outside world, allowing only limited cultural, political and trade relationships.

Hence China and the rest of the world have interacted with each other only as much as it has been necessary to close business deals, reach political agreements and promote culture in terms of the arts. Until recently, interactions between China and the world remained somehow superficial; price and profit (not necessarily monetary) defined it all. Things, however, are much different now.

Conviction of the benefit of cross-cultural interactions has reached China and so it has opened the doors for others to enter, and for the Chinese to venture off the great walls enclosing this country. As fascinating as they may be, the increasing cross-cultural interactions taking place now in China are also a source of conflict, one of those conflicts arising from how people from different cultural backgrounds perform daily tasks whether social, political, or commercial.

The present research is the first step towards conducting a comprehensive comparative study on the management of cross-cultural groups within business organizations. Results from this research constitute the basis to reach better understanding on what aspects may influence the success of cross-cultural teams. It provides data that allows for understanding what aspects of human interaction may be important for people from different countries, so that when conflicts arise, they are approached with clearer understanding of the origin of the conflict as well as with a better management strategy in mind, hence allowing multicultural teamsto work more efficiently.

2. Relevance

Most expatriate projects fail because they normally start without considering what experts in the area of cross-cultural interaction term "cultural fit" (Hofstede, 2003). To properly approach this cultural fit, one has to take into consideration the multi-criteria nature of human problems (J. Skulmoski, 2007). Studies such as the one presented in this document may help business organizations to collect information regarding which foreign cultures are more easilyaccepted by local communities; hence helping organizations to make wiser decisions regarding the selection of cultural groups that may fit their organizational and national cultures better, which in turn will help them to build more effective multicultural teams. Results from research using the criteria provided in this investigation may also help to predict behavior and situational responses, which is valuable to devise management systems suitable to multicultural teams.

3. Theoretical Background

Business organizations in China, both local and foreign, are experiencing the challenges of cross-cultural interactions to maintain organizational stability and growth. China's long lasting cultural and organizational norms are not proving to be effective in preventing, avoiding or dealing with cross-cultural conflicts. Accordingly, an ability to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds has become especially important to organizational wellbeing in general, and international organizations in particular (Yousofpourfard, 2010). A more sophisticated and well-trained management is needed to cope with the complexities of the organization's involvement in multiple foreign markets (Novicevic, 2012).

Researchers have noted that managers' ability to work cross-culturally is a crucial success factor in competing in the global marketplace effectively (Dadfar & Gustavsson, 1992; Granstrand, Hakanson & Sjolander, 1993). This multi-cultural management team can serve as a heterogeneous nucleus providing the company with a distinctive competency that is difficult for competitors to replicate (Harvey, Novicevic & Speier, 1999).

A recent seminar in Shanghia organized by the Huashang Research Center of Fudan University, where about 60 scholars and entrepreneurs gathered together to discuss the future of Chinese business culture in the age of China's globalization, exposed that culture remains the main factor hindering successful globalization process, and that regardless of the existing research and literature, a system that may help business organizations in China to deal properly with cultural conflicts is still lacking.

Although multinational organizations continue to establish businesses in China, many of them have not achieved the success they expected. In fact, foreign managers 'have often reported frustration and confusion when doing business in China' (Zhao, 2000, p. 209).

Professor Geert Hofstede developed five dimensions through which we can study and understand how culture affects interaction in cross-cultural settings. Research other than Hofstedehas also addressed the study of country culture from different perspectives and has proposed more complex models for measuring culture (Hair et al., 1963; Laurent, 1986). The GLOBE project has cited results of a wide-scale study by more than 150 researchers collecting information on more than 18,000 middle managers in 62 countries (Javidan & House, 2001). The nine critical cultural dimensions considered, partially overlapping Hofstede's, are: (1) Performance orientation, (2) Future orientation, (3) Assertiveness, (4) Uncertainty avoidance, (5) Power distance, (6) Collectivism, (7) Family collectivism, (8) Gender differentiation, and (9) Humane orientation.

Studies on management in the China context in terms of its economic significance and its impact on China itself are numerous (Willmott, 1960, Silin, 1976, Yoshihara, 1988, Redding, 1989, S. L. Wong, 1983, Limlingan, 1986, Lim & Gosling, 1983, Omohundro, 1981, Hamilton, 1989, Tam, 1989 ; Wong, 1986). However, among this literature, limitations still exist in terms of a relative paucity of extensive empirical data, and the general absence in comparative management of an agreed framework to handle the question of culture and causation (Redding & Hsiao, 1990).

Because of the still strong "familistic" atmosphere of Chinese organizations, which implies (a) monopoly ownership of economic resources at the top, (b) high dependence by the majority of the subordinates, (c) paternalistic response by the superior, and (d) an exchange of protection downwards and loyalty upwards, … large-scale coordination and cooperation is the Achilles heel of the Chinese organization and there is a constant battle of trust. Chinese organizations suffer from three constrains directly attributed to problems of trust: First of all, senior level talent may not be adequate or enough to cope with current challenges of global competition, and there is a natural danger of mediocrity (Reddings & Hsiao, 1990). Several decades ago, Foster proposed the notion that a society with an “image of limited good”, such as those of China and the four Tigers, will not develop extensive systems of cooperation (Foster, 1965). Following the long-lasting cultural traditions of these Chinese societies, that image remains a pillar with strong influence upon the Chinese thinking and behavior. The argument placed by Redding and Hsia in this regard is that “in a society where the good things in life are perceived as limited and not-expendable, then personal gain must be at the expense of others.Secondly, in order to block talent from new generations, early encouragement is stifled by the lack of opportunity, which in turn causes migration of talent and an inevitable weakening of the organization. Thirdly, is the restriction of organizational complexity; that is the tendency to keep activities within the control of the chief executive, which may lead to a limited scale of operations or to a narrowing of product or market focus.However, there are advantages in flexibility when one-man decision-making takes place (ibid).This large amount of research suggests that people’s blue print determines much of how we see the world, both socially and professionally.

This investigation and its hypotheses were motivated by the conflicts and frustrations in cross-cultural interactions due to different points of view regarding what really matters for carrying out cross-cultural interactions. The sample for this investigation was taken from businesses in the USA and China.

4. Hypotheses

- There is a significant difference between what professionals from China and the USA consider as important in terms of carrying out successful cross-cultural interactions.
- Professionals from both China and the USA consider attitude important in carrying out successful cross-cultural interactions.

5. Method

5.1 Criteria Selection

Observations from conversations with people from a wide variety of cultures indicated to the investigator that people around the world select their networks based on different criteria. Because the present research is qualitative in nature, and in order to eliminate subjectivity and assure pan-culturally accepted criteria, the Delphi Method (7) was used to identify what professionals in China and USA may consider critical elements to successfully carry outsocial cross-cultural interaction within organizational settings. The sample selection was based on these considerations: a) results from this research would be the basis for further research involving Chinese and Western employees working in China, b) the global importance of both China and the USA, and c) the accessibility of professionals from these two countries, which permitted faster data collection. Four basic conditions for the sample selection were also taken into consideration, as follows: knowledge and work experience with the issues under investigation, capacity and willingness to participate, sufficient time to participate andeffective communication skills.

Using the Delphi method, business people from China and the USA were invited to fill out a questionnaire intended to find out whether or not the aforementioned aspects were considered important for the kind of relationship here studied. They were also asked to extend the list of aspects if any. The original list was created by the author and included *foreign language ability, academic background, nationality, age, gender, friendliness, skin color, height and appearance*; it was based on field observations within Taiwanese business organizations. This first list of aspects was passed to 20 CEO’s, VP’s, GM’sand managers in the USA and China Mainland, who screened and rated each aspect as important or not. The level of importance was not crucial at this point; the author’s intention was to find out which aspects people from these two different cultures would view as important, and collect other aspects that would enhance the value of the criteria. These two groups of professionals also suggested other aspects, from which a second list was created. The value and accuracy of the second list was again screened by a different group of 20 professional from the same countries, the results of which formed the basis for a final list of 27 variables used for this investigation. The final list includes the following aspects: *Academic background, age, appearance, friendliness, gender, foreign language capability, height, mother tongue, nationality, skin color, clothing, being active and positive, health condition, responsibility, creativity, quality of education, credentials, good demeanor, sociability, interests, communication skills, good command of English, intellectual curiosity, willingness to learn, flexibility, sense of humor, being humble andwork experience*. These aspects were then separated into three categories including *physical aspects, attitude, and education and skills* (See appendix A). Those variables rated important by more than 20% of the respondents have been taken as the elements to conduct the present study.

5.2 Data Collection

One hundredand five professionals in the area of international trade were provided with criteria (in English and Chinese) and asked to rate them as very important (1), important (2), somehow important (3) or not important at all (4). The respondents' rate was 93% from China and 75% from the USA. The first selection was then rearranged based on all responses and sent again for reevaluation.In order to facilitate calculations, the lowest number of respondents, seventy, was taken as a final sample for both groups of respondents.

5.3 Research Scope

Businessmen in China and the USA.

5.4 Framework

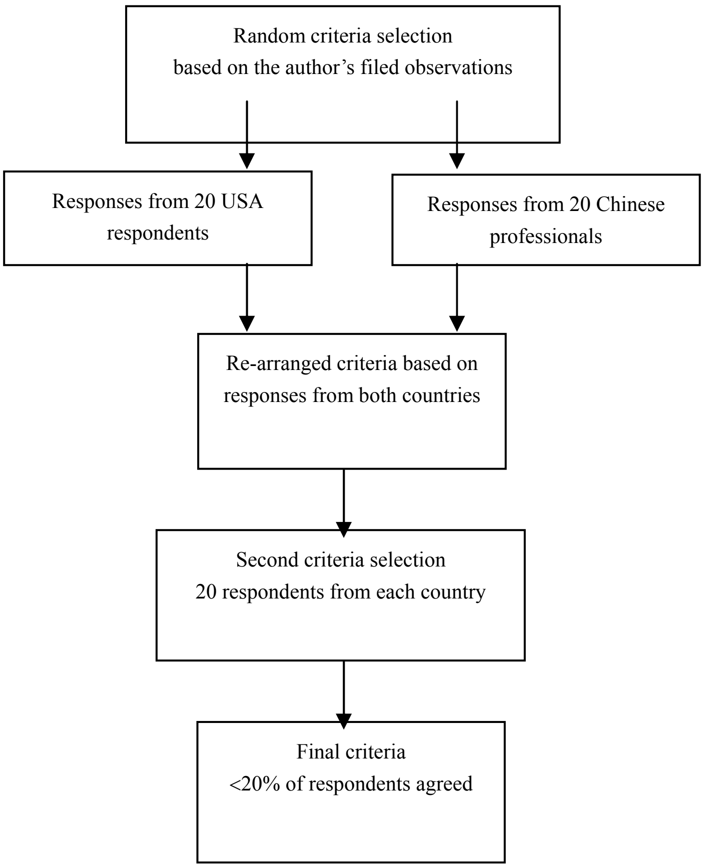

Figure 1. The framework of the study

6. Results and Discussions

As stated in hypothesis one, professionals from the USA and China rated the provided criteria differently. These differences may be key to understanding where cross-cultural conflict originates and how to manage it.

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

As a first step to make sense of the data, basic descriptive statistics had been carried out. The results show how professionals from both countries rate each of the variables as (1) very important, (2) important, (3) somehow important, and (4) not important at all. Professionals from the USA are more concern with education and skills as well as with attitude than professionals from China. Both groups consider education, skills and attitude important or very important, but respondents from China seemed also to be highly concerned with physical aspects, which are less important for the USA sample.

These results are in line with the author's observations regarding the special attention the Chinese put on appearance in work settings; they tend to determine how to interact with other people based on what those visual clues tell them about the person. Aspects related to appearance seem to be key for the Chinese to know how to proceed in interpersonal situations. Knowledge of what meanings the Chinese attached to what appearance-related symbols may make it easier for the foreigner (and the Chinese) to start the interaction than when such information is not available.

Table 1. Responses from the USA

Categories	Responses from the USA		
	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education & Skills	English	14,638	,67692
	Creativity	15,652	,71698
	Language	16,377	,85700
	Com_Skills	1,70	,692
	Edu_Quality	18,551	,91194
	Curiosity	19,275	,81021
	Credentials	20,145	,93136
	Mother Tongue	20,435	104,930
	Academic background	20,725	103,354
	Interests	27,391	,77937
Attitude	Flexibility	14,928	,50361
	Sociability	16,232	,72965
	Willingness to Learn	16,667	,65679
	Responsibility	16,812	,86590
	Friendliness	17,536	,88127
	Positiviy	18,551	,82739
	Good Demeanor	20,580	105,557
	Sense_of_Humour	29,565	,79400
	Being humble	30,580	,63903
Physical Aspects	Age	19,565	,88176
	Health	19,855	,83124
	Appearance	21,014	,90983
	Clothing	23,478	,99744
	Gender	25,507	,91613
	Height	32,754	,76474
	Skin color	32,899	,72965

Table 2. Responses from China

Categories	Responses from China		
	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education & Skills	English	19,710	101,418
	Edu_Quality	20,000	101,460
	Language	20,000	104,319
	Com_Skills	2,03	1,043
	Credentials	20,435	106,322
	Interests	20,580	105,557
	Creativity	20,725	103,354
	Mother Tongue	20,725	104,767
	Curiosity	20,725	107,538
	Academic background	21,014	104,523
Attitude	Sociability	19,565	102,088
	Flexibility	20,000	102,899
	Responsibility	20,000	102,899
	Sense_of_Humour	20,145	103,601
	Being humble	20,290	101,418
	Friendliness	20,580	105,557
	Good Demeanor	20,580	104,155
	Willingness to Learn	20,580	104,155
	Positivity	20,725	104,767
Physical Aspects	Age	19,855	103,601
	Height	20,000	102,899
	Clothing	20,145	103,601
	Skin_Color	20,290	105,679
	Health	20,435	106,322
	Gender	20,580	105,557
	Appearance	20,725	104,767

6.2 Principal Component Analysis

In order to find out the proportion of variance in the given variables between the two groups, the KMO and Bartlett's Test were conducted to verify whether or not the principal component analysis is meaningful. The sampling adequacy is an indicator between 0 and 1, 1 being the ideal outcome. Table 3 shows an adequacy of approximately 0.8, which is highly satisfactory, and significance of the Bartlett's test is 0.000. These results indicate that the principal component analysis is meaningful and that a factor analysis may be useful to have a better understanding of the data.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling	Adequacy.	,799
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3469,534
	df	325
	Sig.	,000

6.3 Initial Eigenvalues

Initial Eigenvalues were calculatedto find out how many variance groups are necessary to explain. For the current calculations those groups are termed Components. Results show that 6 components are necessary to explain about 77% of the overall variance (at high percentage).

Table 4. Initial eigenvalues

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8,968	34,492	34,492
2	3,340	12,847	47,339
3	2,745	10,558	57,898
4	2,050	7,885	65,783
5	1,608	6,186	71,969
6	1,199	4,612	76,581

6.4 SSP Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings

In order to ensure the reliability of further calculations, a second set of eigenvalues was conducted after the rotation of the factor space. This process redistributes the percentages of variance more equally among the components. Results still show that 6 components are necessary to explain about 77% of the overall variance (at high percentage).

Table 5. Rotation sums of squared loadings

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4,710	18,116	18,116
2	4,502	17,317	35,433
3	4,037	15,527	50,960
4	3,071	11,811	62,770
5	1,985	7,634	70,405
6	1,606	6,176	76,581

6.5 Component Matrix

The component matrix shows the relationship between the variables and the components after rotation. Components selected for further discussion will contain variables of the highest values above 0.5 (For easy reference, variables and values are highlighted in color). Each component is described.

Table 6. Rotated component matrix. extraction method: principal component analysis. rotation method: varimax with kaiser normalization (rotation converged in 7 iterations)

Rotated Component Matrix[a]						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Willingness to Learn	,844					
Clothing	,798					
Good_Demeanor	,775					
Health	,725			,300		
Mother_Tongue	,715	,368				
Age	,696					
Credentials	,661			~~,461~~		
Appearance		,864				
Positivity		,842				
Interests		,841				
Gender		,808				
Creativity		,770			~~-,309~~	
Flexibility			,951			
English			,940			
Sociability			,936			
Edu_Quality			,877			
Friendliness				,796		
Curiosity			~~,335~~	,653		
Language				,592	~~-,375~~	
Academic		~~,396~~		,530		
Com_Skills	~~,324~~			,507		~~-,332~~
Sense_of_Humour					,708	
Skin_Color	~~,572~~				,592	~~,367~~
Height		~~,572~~			,582	
Being humble						,832
Responsibility	~~,387~~			~~,425~~	~~-,316~~	,594

Table 7. Variables per component

Component	Variables
1	Willingness to learn, Clothing, Good Demeanor, Health, Mother Tongue, Age, Credentials
2	Appearance, Positivity, Interests, Gender, Creativity
3	Flexibility, English Fluency, Sociability, Quality of Education
4	Friendliness, Curiosity, Language, Communication skills, Academic
5	Sense of Humor, Height, Color of Skin
6	Being humble, Responsibility

6.6 Graphical Interpretation

A series of graphics was created to clarifythe difference between the two groups of respondents further. The scatter plot on figure 1 shows all six components (namedFactorsin the graphics), and a clear separation between respondents from the USA and China on factors 5 & 3, 5 & 4 and 5 & 6. Perhaps the most interesting finding shown on the graphics is that respondents from China show to be significantly scattered regarding how they, as a group, ratedthe provided criteria. Respondents from the USA, on the other hand, show to be more cohesive in their way of thinking regarding all of thecriteria.

In some respects, this result may seem contradictory to the theory supporting the concepts of individualistic versus collectivistic societies, of the USA and China respectively (Hofstede 2003), since such theoretical approaches maybe mistakably understood as if people from a collectivist country think alike, which may not be the case, as shown by the results of this investigation. In a collectivistic society people may stay together for other reasons rather than unity of thoughts. Further research in this respect may be necessary.

Respondents from China give more importance to sense of humor, height, skin color (appearance-related aspects), being humble and responsibility (attitude-related aspects) than respondents from the USA.This finding is in accordance with field observations conducted by the author over the last eighteen years, which suggestthat, the Chinese make quick judgments of people and situations based on appearance; they seem to give great importance to visual clues when interacting with others.The importance of being humbleis in accordance with the Chinese peoples' tendency to keep a low profile in public settings. This may be changing in modern China, and further investigation may be necessary in order to update our current knowledge.

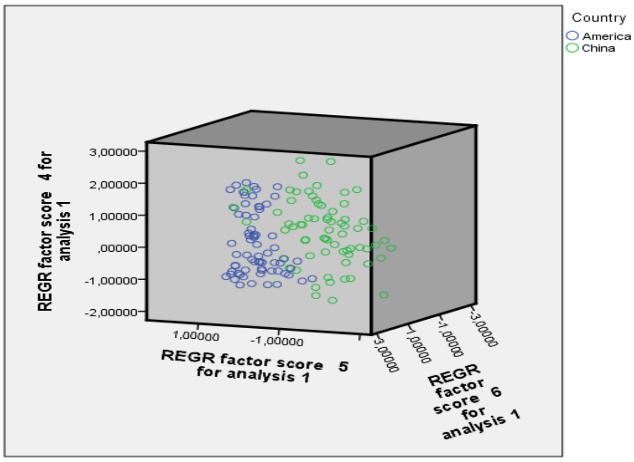

Figure 2. Factors scatter-plot

Separation among the Chinese is clearly greater than separation among respondents from the USA.

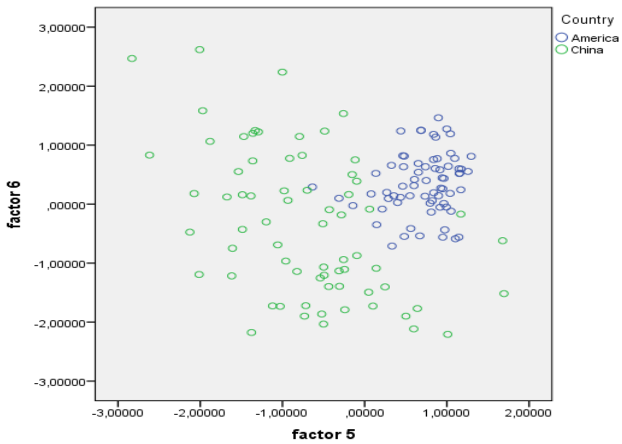

Figure 3. Factors 5 and 6 scatter plot showing a great separation amongst the Chinese

These two factors show the greatest difference between the two groups of respondents, but do not indicate that the variables in these two factors are deemed as more important for either group. Respondents from the USA regard English, creativity and flexibility as the three most important aspects. The Chinese respondents do not show preference as a group, rather they consider all the elements important, so it's difficult to say what their preferences as a group is. Table 8 belowshows the components 5 and 6 for the reader's easy reference.

Table 8. Factors 5 and 6

Factor 5	Sense of Humor, Height, Color of Skin
Factor 6	Being humble, Responsibility

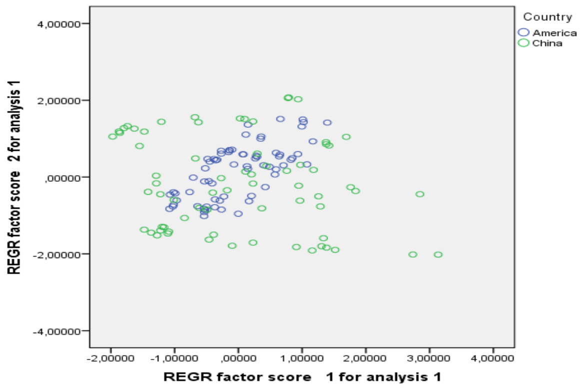

Figure 4. Factors 1 and 2 scatter-plot

Both the Chinese and USA groups seem to differ in how each respondent considerseach variable within these two factors. The Chinese respondents are much more scattered than the respondents from the USA.On the whole, the US and Chinese react in the same way regarding these two factors. Table 9 below shows components 1 and 2 for the reader's easy reference.

Table 9. Components 1 and 2

Component	Variables
1	Willingness to learn, Clothing, Good Demeanor, Health, Mother Tongue, Age, Credentials
2	Appearance, Positivity, Interests, Gender, Creativity

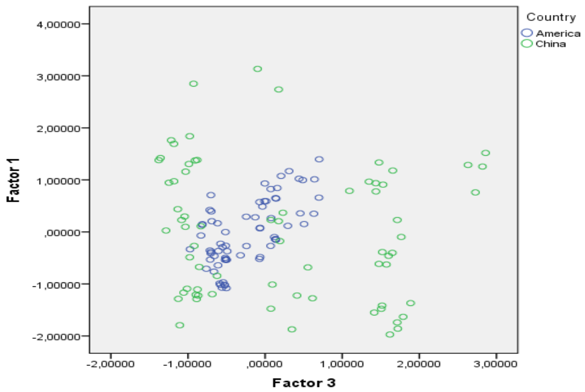

Figure 5. Factors 1 and 3 scatter-plot

However diverse opinions are within the groups, both tend to agree on the level of importance of aspects in factors 3 and 1. Table 10 below shows components 1 an 3 for the reader's easy reference.

Table 10. Components 1 and 3

Component	Variables
1	Willingness to learn, Clothing, Good Demeanor, Health, Mother Tongue, Age, Credentials
3	Flexibility, English Fluency, Sociability, Quality of Education

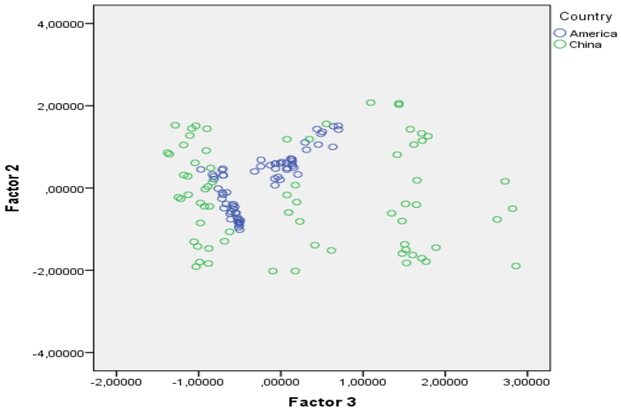

Figure 6. Factors 2 and 3 scatter-plot

Both groups seem to have different points of view regarding the importance of these two factors. Regardless of internal diversity of opinions, the respondents from the USA still show to be a more cohesive group. Table 11 below shows components 2 and 3 for the reader’s easy reference.

Table 11. Components 2 and 3

Component	Variables
2	Appearance, Positivity, Interests, Gender, Creativity
3	Flexibility, English Fluency, Sociability, Quality of Education

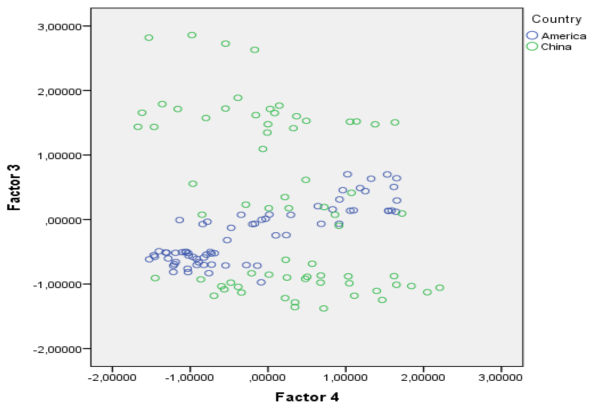

Figure 7. Factors 3 and 4 scatter-plot

Separation within the Chinese group of respondents continues to very evident. Table 12 below shows components 3 and 4 for the reader’s easy reference.

Table 12. Components 3 and 4

Component	Variables
3	Flexibility, English Fluency, Sociability, Quality of Education
4	Friendliness, Curiosity, Language, Communication skills, Academic background

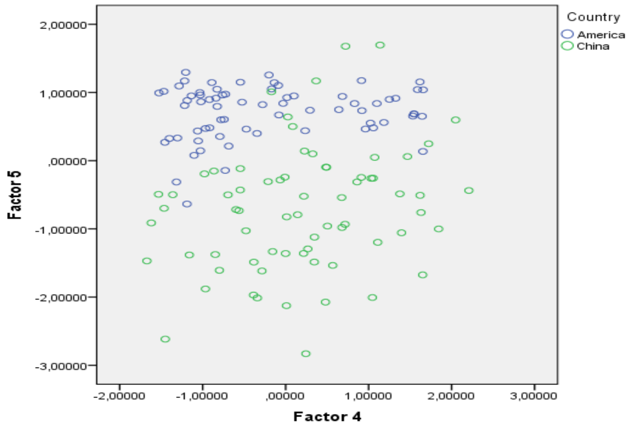

Figure 8. Factors 4 and 5 scatter-plot

Another clear difference between groups is shown, with more Chinese respondents giving more importance to aspects within these two factors.

Table 13. Components 4 y 5

Component	Variables
4	Friendliness, Curiosity, Language, Communication skills, Academic background
5	Sense of Humor, Height, Color of Skin

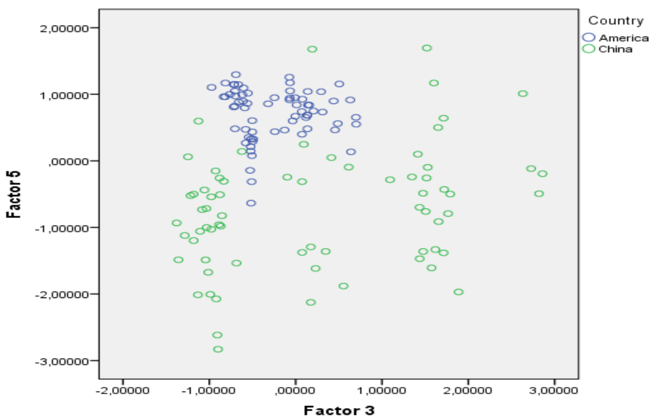

Figure 9. Factors 3 and 5 scatter-plot

Two things are very noticeable on this graph. One, the clear difference in opinions between the two groups regarding the level of importance of the given criteria, and two, an even clearer separation within the Chinese group regarding these two factors as compared with the group of respondents from the USA. For the Western group the variables within these two factors are less important than for the Asian group.

Table 14. Components 3 y 5

Component	Variables
3	Flexibility, English Fluency, Sociability, Quality of Education
5	Sense of Humor, Height, Color of Skin

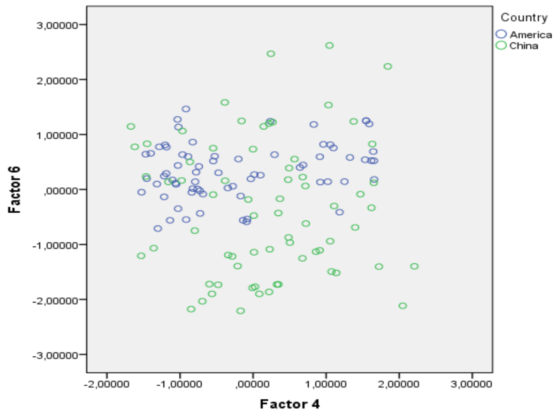

Figure 10. Factors 4 and 6 scatter-plot

Table 15. Components 4 y 6

Component	Variables
4	Friendliness, Curiosity, Language, Communication skills, Academic background
6	Being humble, Responsibility

6.7 Comparative Charts Per Criteria Groups, Here Named Clusters

Below are three pairs of comparative charts (physical aspects, education and skills, and attitude) showing clear differences between the two groups of respondents. This graph, obtained from simple excel functions, is consistent with the more advanced calculations included above, and may help the reader to understand the difference better.

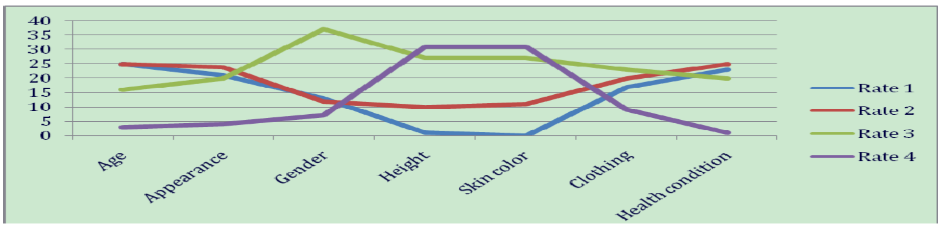

Figure 11. USA responses to Physical Aspects cluster

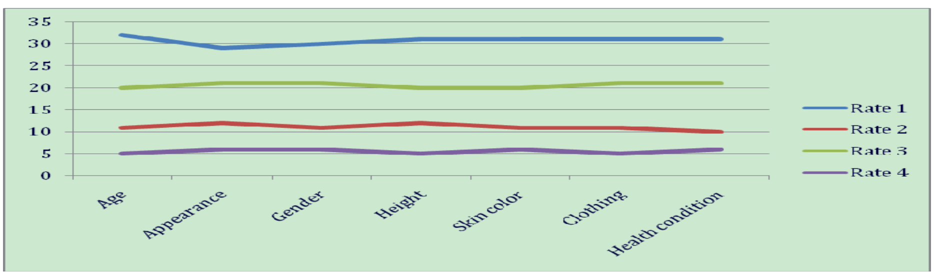

Figure 12. Chinese responses to Physical Aspects cluster

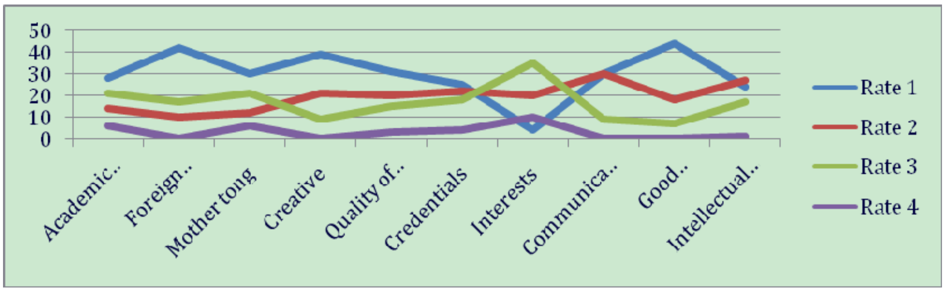

Figure 13. USA responses to Education & Skills cluster

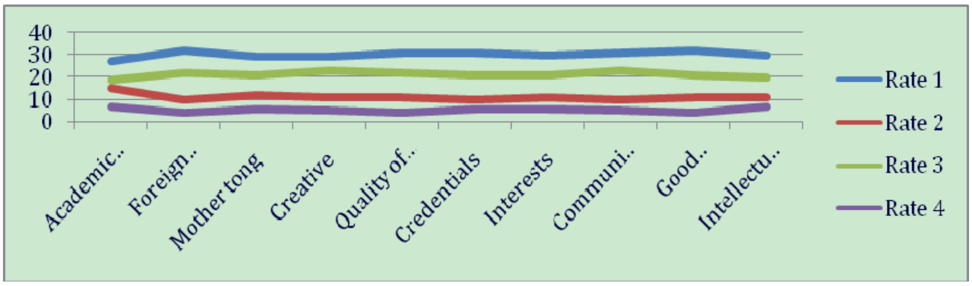

Figure 14. Chinese responses to Education and skills cluster

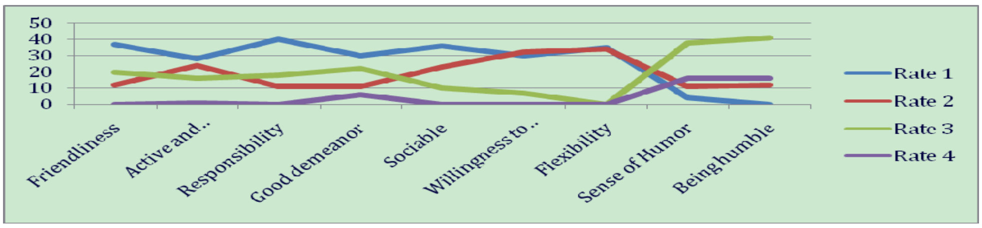

Figure15. USA responses to Attitude cluster

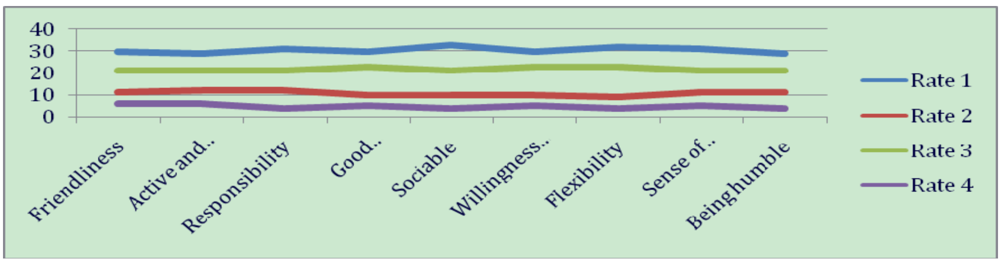

Figure 16. Chineseresponses to Attitude cluster

7. Conclusions

What matters the most for this investigation is to find out which aspects both groups consider either as very important or not important at all, that is, we are interested in the extremes regarding what is important and what is not to both respondents from the USA and from China. The reason for stressing the extremes is that they may represent the limits of tolerance, which in turn may or may not lead to conflict. For example, in order to start and maintain harmonious relationships with people from the USA, English language capabilities would be very important. The lack or low levels of English may create conflict between people from the USA and people from other countries due to people from the USA feeling they are missing important information. Experience interacting with people from the USA would suggest that they have very little tolerance regarding a lack or clarity of insufficient information in a language they can clearly understand. The USA is a society where large amounts of information are included in business contracts, which for the Chinese may be seen as annoying and unnecessary. Chinese people are more tolerant in this regard, however, perhaps because they are a high-context society, they tend not to pay attention to written rules but to social tacit agreements. Interaction with the Chinese (would) show their tendency not to ask for more data regardless of the level of clarity, sufficiency or amount of information they receive. It's important to remind the reader that this research focuses on the China context and the conflicts foreigners may experience in China.

For the majority of Chinese respondents, sociability is the most important aspect for carrying out cross-cultural relationships. Sociability may be one of the most critical originators of conflict between Chinese and non-Chinese people since China is a society where strong social bonds are necessary for survival, which the author of this investigation terms *social currency*. The lack of such currency may limit access to important information, which in turn may affect performance, leading to frustration, disagreements, anger and migration. The economic loss of such conflicts may be large. Further investigation in this area may be necessary.

Experience in corporate life in China unveils the fact that it is very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the Chinese as well as for non-Chinese to build social bonds between each other, because what matters for each one socially or professionally is different. Hence social currency may never be created, which in turn would not allow the necessary sociability to make things run effectively at work. There is too much social currency involved in work affairs in China.

The author in this investigation considers it important to remind the reader of the following aspects regarding sociability: 1) social currency is important in every society, not only in China. 2) Sociability by itself does not create conflict; what causes conflict is the way people from different societies usesociability to build social currency. For example, remaining quiet and avoiding confrontation may be the best way to build social currency for the Chinese, while for people from the USA expressing their points of view in an open manner may work better. 3) Social norms are not universal; theyhave been created for people to be able to make sense of their immediate surroundings. To survive in a different society and lower the impact of conflict upon the person and his or her tasks at work, one has to pay attention to and follow the local social norms.

Looking at the lowest levels of importance, the Chinese hold academic background as the least important, while for the US group skin color is the least important. We may imply that coming to China, people's academic level may not be as important as their capability to build social currency. Such a situation may be likely to cause conflict, especially for people who hold their academic achievement as key to their personal growth and social and professional status.

Skin color, the least important aspect for respondents from the USA, is still very high in importance for the Chinese.This point may create conflict between the Chinese and people with physical characteristics that are not welcome by the Chinese.

Table 16. Most and least important variables for USA respondents

USA extreme levels of importance		
Variable	**Mean**	**St. Deviation**
English	1,4638	,67692
Skin Color	3,2899	,72965

Table 17. Most and least important variables for for Chinese respondents

China extreme levels of importance		
Variable	**Mean**	**St. Deviation**
Sociability	1,9565	1,02088
Academic Background	2,1014	1,04523

Since the Chinese, as a group, view all of the criteria as important, responses from the USA group have been taken as reference to analyze the differences and possible conflict originators between the two groups.On the higher rates of importance (less than 2), fourteen variables are considered important or very important by the USA group, with *English level, creativity and flexibility* the most important, and age and health the least important. (Tables 18 and 19 below) 85% of those variables are related to education, skills and attitude, with only two variables, age and health condition, relating to physical aspects. The Chinese group shows a different scenario regarding the importance of the variables for the cross-cultural interactions here studied. 35% of the fourteen variables are related to attitude, 35% related to physical aspects and 30% related to education and skills,with sociability being the most important for this group. Of the whole criteria, aspects related to appearance are least important for the USA group, with *being humble, height and skin color* being the lowest in importance. In general respondents from the USA consider aspects related to appearance the least important, while respondents from China consider more aspects related to appearance important and more aspects related to education and skills less important. These findings may seem surprising for a society that holds education as a strong social drive. Further investigation regarding China's education system and the reasons why the Chinese engage in so much study may be necessary to explain this disparity. Perhaps education is important for the Chinese because it leads to better social status, which may be crucial in a society where what matters the most at work is social currency.

Table 18. Respondents from the USA

Categories	**Responses from the USA**		
	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education & Skills	English	14,638	,67692
	Creativity	15,652	,71698
	Language	16,377	,85700
	Com_Skills	1,70	,692
	Edu_Quality (School they attend)	18,551	,91194
	Curiosity	19,275	,81021
Attitude	Flexibility	14,928	,50361
	Sociability	16,232	,72965
	Willingness_Learn	16,667	,65679
	Responsibility	16,812	,86590
	Friendliness	17,536	,88127
	Positiviy	18,551	,82739
Physical Aspects	Age	19,565	,88176
	Health	19,855	,83124

Table 19. Respondents from China

Categories	Responses from China		
	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education & Skills	English	19,710	101,418
	Edu_Quality (School they attend)	20,000	101,460
	Language	20,000	104,319
	Communication_Skills	2,03	1,043
Attitude	Sociability	19,565	102,088
	Flexibility	20,000	102,899
	Responsibility	20,000	102,899
	Sense_of_Humour	20,145	103,601
	Being humble	20,290	101,418
Physical Aspects	Age	19,855	103,601
	Height	20,000	102,899
	Clothing	20,145	103,601
	Skin_Color	20,290	105,679
	Health	20,435	106,322

Based on the results of this investigation we may conclude that unity of thought among the Chinese does not exist, or that it has started to disappear due to the tendency towards becoming an individualistic society. Studies in the areas of individualism and collectivism show that the richer a region, the more individualistic it becomes, which is the current phenomenon in China, where the expression "the me generation" has started to be used when referring to the generation born in the 80's or later.

Most professionals from both countries agreed that the most important aspects to carry out successful cross-cultural interactions are Creativity, Humility, Sense of Humor, Experience, and Willingness to learn. Four of them belong to attitude. This may be an indication that attitude is highly important for the success of cross-cultural interactions. Experience would also suggest that attitude influences the start as well as the maintenance of the interaction. Whether the start or the maintenance of the interaction receives the higher influence may require further research.

Attitude may be very important for successful relationships, and may be one of the aspects that disrupts harmony more easily.

It is important to keep in mind that "attitude", or the "right attitude" has a cultural tint. Hence, the international community is advised to become acquaintedwith what is the "right attitude" for people of foreign countries when one considers developing a relationship with people from that nation, especially if the relationship would take place within the foreign boundaries. A change of attitude would be advised when relationships, of any kind, are at risk of breaking down.

Professionals from China gave physical aspects more importance than respondents from the USA. Based on the results from this investigation, we may conclude that appearance management should be taken into consideration when one intends to start a relationship with people from China, since they may need those visual clues to know how to interact with the foreigner. Onthe façade, the Chinese seem not to pay much attention to physical aspects, or appearance in general, but it seems that they do, perhaps not about them self, but expect some visual clues to make sense of the person with whom they intent to interact. Experience interacting with the Chinese would tell that they closely follow stereotypes based on appearance such as how a businessman, for example, should look, behave and dress.

Results of this investigation may be significant since they may allow professionals from both countries to be better prepared when they intend to start mutual cooperation or enhance existing ones. The data accumulatedin this research may also allow for: a) Predictability of behavior during cross-cultural interactions (it is important to mention that the investigator considers predictability a rather complicated circumstantial matter, so the results from this investigation are not intended to stand for fixed formulas regarding human behavior), b) Prevent unintended mistakes coming from lack of accurate knowledge of cultural differences, c) Help to correct management systems of cross-cultural groups, and d) Encourage the review and/or modification of education systems in the areas of cross-cultural interaction, international trade, and globalization.

8. Limitations

Besides being dispersed, Chinese respondentsregard all of the variables as important. Such a result places a questionon credibility. It is not possible to distinguish which aspects the Chinese find most important.

9. Further Research

a. Comparative study between experts from different fields.

b. Comparative studies among experts of the same discipline from different cultures.

c. Comparative study between female and male professionals.

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Appendix

Critical aspects people consider critical to carry on successful cross-cultural interactions? 以多文化交流的重要因素			
Second Professional's Selection			
Personal Information			个人资料
Nationality 国籍: Area of expertise Please select "important" or "not important" for each of he following criteria		Gender	
Criteria		Important 重要	Not important 不重要
Academic background	学业		
Age	年龄		
Appearance	外貌		
Friendliness	亲和性		

Gender	性别
Foreign language capability	外语能力
Height	身高
Mother tong	母语
Nationality	国籍
Skin color	肤色
Clothing	服饰
Being active and positive	有效和正人
Health condition	健康
Responsibility	有责任感
Creative	创造性
Quality of education	教育剂量
Credentials	证书
Good demeanor	态度
Sociability	善社交
Interests	兴趣
Communication skills	沟通能力
Good command of English	高等英语
Intellectual Curiosity	智力求知欲
Willingness to learn	学习态度
Flexibility	灵活性
Sense of Humor	好幽默感
Humility	谦卑
Experience	经验