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CHINESE AND NORTH AMERICANS: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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The Issue of Knowing

Being and knowing, two fundamental philosophical issues that can be traced to ancient Greece, are still intriguing and controversial today. The two can often be reduced to one, that of knowing, because any ontological position naturally leads to the epistemological question: "How do you know?" The importance of this question to communication is that the definition of communication would be totally different, given different viewpoints (Gregg, 1984; Littlejohn, 1989). In the West, the issue of knowing generates disagreement shown in such opposing propositions as: (a) people know because the world exists for them to perceive; or (b) people know because humans have the ability to reason.¹ The two positions lead logically to differing views of communi-

cation. The knowing-is-perceiving position presupposes an objective world that is the criterion for the truthfulness of knowledge. It follows that if the truth is knowable, it is communicable. Thus, communication is regarded as a tool for transferring or reflecting truth. This is the more traditional view of rhetoric as an ancient discipline of speech communication.² The knowing-is-reasoning position, on the contrary, invests great faith in humans as rational beings, capable of creating and using symbols. Such symbolic practice leads to reasoning and the production of knowledge. This is the epistemological root of another view of communication—that it is itself a process of knowing. This view can be found in some contemporary scholarship.³ The distinct epistemological positions of empiricism versus rationalism reflect the Western tradition of the mind-body

dichotomy extant since the 17th century. Each tradition recently has been challenged again in the scientific community and in rhetorical studies (Gregg, 1984). The field of communication also has attempted to establish a middle-of-the-road position between the two extremes, with varying degrees of success. Many such efforts, however, either finally sided with one of the two positions in a more subtle way or are regarded to have done so by others.⁴

In studies of language philosophy, Fodor (1976, 1981) provides an enlightening argument on the acquisition of concepts (as expressed by linguistic symbols) as knowing at the earliest stage of development. He points out that the point of dispute between nativism (rationalism) and empiricism has been misrepresented by those who state that the former believes in the power of mind, whereas the latter favors experience of an objective world. He argues that the opposite can be proved: The nativist continues to rely on experience, whereas the empiricist, in fact, also lives by reasoning. He posits that innate capacities for concept acquisition may operate only when triggered by external stimuli, whereas the processes of learning (or knowing) through experiences operate through inductive reasoning that either confirms or rejects concept formation. It can be shown that both positions are rooted in the common belief that the acquisition of a primitive concept is a function of environmental stimulation, that is, contingent upon the activation of the sensorium. Moreover, both assume that complex concepts are formed from primitive concepts through some kind of combination apparatus. This argument from studies on the most fundamental level of knowing (concept acquisition) forcefully advances the concept that, whereas different views may place different emphasis on which is more important, there is no denying the implicit position; that is, people know as a result of interaction between the innately capable mind and the external world.

This position is supported by studies on concept categorization in cognitive science. Human beings are assumed to be active processors of information (Eiser, 1980) who make sense or acquire knowledge by categorizing sensory information input. Findings in cognitive, linguistic, anthropological, and developmental research (for

more references, see Chen, 1987) have indicated that, as a process of generalization, human categorization operates in a hierarchical manner, classifying information into levels of categories by degree of abstractness from the most specific (i.e., a category of one case) to the most general (i.e., a category that includes all cases that share even the slightest common feature). The findings indicate further that there exists a basic (generic) level of categories where abstraction is such that members of these categories are perceptually identifiable and are usually identified with a single word, for example, *dog* or *cat* (Rosch, 1978). This is the last level wherein categorization is based largely on ostensive sensory data. Beyond this level, the categories are too abstract to provide a typical exemplar of a category member. For example, we can readily point to a particular dog to exemplify *dog*, the concept; however, it is hard to do the same to exemplify the concept *animal*. People see a dog or a cat, but not an animal. It follows from this that one can plausibly assume that categorizations on more than basic levels are largely based on symbolic data. Symbolic data, however, are generalizations of sensory data. It has been suggested that the basic level most clearly points to the probability of innate capabilities: Names of basic categories have been found to always be the first words children (including those with a handicapping condition such as blindness or total hearing loss) learn in any culture and are almost all encoded into lexical items in most languages. Differences occur only on levels either above (superordinate level: more abstract and general), or below the basic level (subordinate levels: with greater or more specific details).

The significance of this thesis is that it suggests a way to account for cultural variation as well as universal aspects of cultures. Coding and categorizing of information from the environment are the same in all cultures at the basic level; variation among cultures would be represented by categorization discrepancies on levels that are either more general or more specific. Different cultures may put the same basic information in different categories at more abstract levels, that is, interpret it differently. From this standpoint, communication is symbolic expression and/or symbolic exchange of that which is perceived (Gregg,

1984). It may not coincide perfectly with the external world or between communicators, but there is enough overlap to allow communication.

Structure of Consciousness

Among obvious cultural differences is that which exists between the East and the West. The differences between the two may even seem to defy comparison. However, careful examination will reveal a commonality as well. To suggest that cultures are different from, and at the same time similar to, one another is a paradox.

The complexity of culture demands a macrocosmic analytic system, so that the study of cultures can be systematic, elaborate, inclusive, and manageable. Gebser's (1985) theory on the origin and mutation of culture provides a viable solution to this problem. Gebser proposes the concept of the structure of consciousness as a framework for studying culture in societies. The consciousness structure consists of the universal dimensions of time, space, sensory perception, ego, existence, and so forth; these are the fundamentals of any culture's understanding of the world, that is knowing, in a broad sense. Consciousness structures are modes of human consciousness with different orientations toward the environment and everything in it, including the society and the properties of humans. From a different perspective, this conceptualization process is analogous to human categorization: There is something basic to all cultures that stands in testimony to existential universals (being cultural-general). Gebser analyzes numerous myths, legends, folklores, epics, tales, and prehistoric artwork, as well as social systems from cultures all over the world. His analyses present convincing evidence of the link between nature and human consciousness manifesting in various dimensions. Even the concept of *negation*, noted by Burke (1968) as a unique human invention, is shown to be related to the natural contrast between day and night, life and death, and presence and absence (see later discussion on polarity). This notion is echoed in psycholinguistic studies where it is demonstrated (Clark & Clark, 1977) that these are, indeed, universal dimensions (represented in such linguistic universals as terms for spatial and temporal rela-

tions, terms for basic colors, etc.) shared by all cultures, reflecting the natural world in which we live. These are basic aspects of life perceptually accessible to all human beings.

The structure of consciousness is conceptualized as the mode knowing, which is associated closely with human activities, dreams and imaginings, emotions, rationality, and self-awareness. Therefore, it is taken as given that different consciousness structures would generate differences in all human pursuits and reactions. Gebser (1985) suggests five structures as the possible major modes of consciousness, distinguished only by variation in their status relative to one another.⁵ These structures coexist in all modern cultures. Features of one consciousness structure (i.e., the way each of the basic dimensions is oriented outward or internalized), which are most distinct in one culture because they constitute its dominant mode of consciousness, may be latent in another culture because that structure may have only minor status there. Dominance of a particular type of consciousness structure, therefore, accounts for a culture's differences from other cultures that use other consciousness structures. At the same time, coexistence of dominant and nondominant consciousness structures provides a base of commonality among all cultures. This model can also be understood in terms of the concept of categorization hierarchy. It was mentioned that cultures, in a sense, differ only in their categorizations at superordinate or subordinate levels. Consciousness structures can be thought of as categorization schemes, whereas basic-level categories developed on the basis of the fundamentals of consciousness are analogous to the universal basic dimensions perceived by the action of external stimuli on the sensorium and its corresponding internal systems. Cultural variation is caused by alternative categorization schemes. Features such as social conventions and traditional values pertaining to interpretations of sensory data (direct observation) thus are on a more abstract level than the basic level in the categorization scheme, which is parallel to the manifestation of basic dimensions that vary in consciousness structures. This way, the seemingly vast differences in the ways that various cultures interpret identical things can be seen as consequences of different categorization or dominance of a

structure of consciousness. The presence of non-dominant structures of consciousness renders possible alternative categorization schemes outside the mainstream culture. Generalization of basic categories (i.e., interpretation of sensory data) at more abstract levels may be influenced by other factors, for example, regional natural environments and ways to survive in those particular environments (Meggers, 1954), which are important conditioners of a culture's categorization.

This is the position of this article. It has been argued that the external world, known through species-specific human mental capabilities, provides all cultures with more or less identical basic knowledge. However, a particular cultural tradition directs its members to observe the world from different perspectives or criteria for judgment and to interpret it differently. According to Weaver,⁶ cited in Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1985), culture is defined as symbolic manifestations of learned rules/orientations in ecologically (with possible overlap) distanced societies. Given fundamental commonality, a culture has the potential of recategorization above the basic level, which would bring forth the latent features of nondominant structures of consciousness to open the door to a different view, thus allowing for intercultural communication. The present article offers a qualitative comparison of the similarities and differences between two different cultures, the Chinese and the North American, as representative of the vastly different cultures of the East and West, in an attempt to find a common ground among many phenomenological differences. The comparison is based on what is available in the literature, as well as on folk wisdom from both cultures. This is followed by an examination of some common problems in intercultural interaction between Chinese and North Americans that show a potential of dissolution by "returning to the basics." Data in the intercultural section of analysis are selected from personal observations and interviews with people in both societies accumulated over a period of 10 years.

Common Domains of Consciousness

It is widely acknowledged that the Western way is predominantly a perspectival approach to every-

thing/anything, with linear/causal thinking and a strong sense of ego/individual, whereas the Eastern way, is the opposite in virtually every respect (e.g., Cheng, 1987; Gebser, 1985; Oliver, 1971; Servaes, 1988; Yum, 1988). But just how different are the two in terms of their consciousness mode? Without directly following the typology, the three most common domains are specified here to compare differences and similarities (time, space, and ego, with relating orientation toward nature, individual, and society) in order to see how traditions and conventions stem from the basic dimensions to make an impact on social interactions.

According to Gebser (1985), the concept of space provides an index of the human concept of self-identity: Lack of spatial awareness is accompanied by a lack of ego awareness, and it is closely related to the conception of time. The recognition of space provides an individual with his or her own visibility and a measure of control of time. Awareness of a time and space relationship not only defines the external world, including the self, but also defines the corresponding internal world as the territory of emotion, imagination, or abstract (rational) thinking. All this is absolutely essential for understanding the differences between the structures of consciousness. The absence of the perspective of view, or spatial consciousness, is characteristic of the Chinese mode of consciousness, whereas its presence is distinct in the North American mode.

Time and Space

The impression that Chinese culture,⁷ in general, is dominated by lack of perspectives in the domain of space/ego consciousness is true to the extent that thinking without perspective is the default mode; in other words, existence of perspectives, or three-dimensional space, is not totally absent, but it is latent, and it is only pushed into attention as specific occasions demand. The customary practice is without perspective. Such familiar sayings as "Listen to all sides and be enlightened; heed only one side and be benighted" (*jian ting ze ming, pian ting ze an*) and "One inch of time is one inch of gold, while one inch of gold cannot buy one inch of time" (*yi cun guangyin yicun jin cun jin nan mai cun guangyin*) are circulated mostly among persons of status and re-

served for use only at critical times. The first saying is ruling advice for an emperor, whereas the second is used to motivate a scholar to work hard so that he or she can pass the national examination and qualify to be appointed as a government official, a position of high status and prestige (Creel, 1953). The perception of time reflected in those sayings is close to the modern Western concept, prominent in the United States (Hall, 1977), of time that is spatialized, materialized, quantified, and hence measurable. This mode of thinking, however, is not common among the Chinese. The Chinese are guided mostly by a two-dimensional view of things. The above instances are examples of the latent presence of nondominant mode(s).

Traditionally, for the Chinese, time is simply there (Oliver, 1971). People do things as they see fit; there are few deadlines to beat and no rush. Some things must be done at a particular time, not because of a schedule but because of the natural circumstances. For example, planting starts in spring because it is warm and wet then—just right for planting; having a sick relative is a good reason for putting off overdue obligations—these can always be done some other time. Here we see a connection to the Tao, which advocates following the natural course and avoiding constraints from human efforts (Cheng, 1987; Ma, 1990; Oliver, 1961, 1971). A similar lack of perspective can be seen in traditional Chinese brush painting, where all the objects or figures are depicted on a flat, two-dimensional surface, with no attempt to present the actual, spatial configuration, in contrast to the detailed, realistic Western painting style. Westerners will appreciate this art form more when they realize that brush painters do not strive for a reproduction of a true-to-life image; rather, they present the spirit, the imagination, or an impression (akin to Western impressionist works—an example of a nondominant mode in Western societies). The difference in perspective, nevertheless, springs from the same root—the awareness of space and time, which holds out the promise of a possible understanding between the two peoples.

Lack of perspective renders a flat view of things that is identical to all; that is, everything and anything is the same to everyone and anyone, with totally interchangeable standings. This view

is reflected in a saying from Confucius, "not to do unto others what you want not to be done on yourself" (*ji suo bu yu wu shi yu ren ye*), compared to the Golden Rule in the Christian culture of the West,⁸ an indication of the presence of a latent mode in the North American culture. Clearly, it is taken for granted that what is good or bad for one person is equally good or bad for another person. This is in sharp contrast to what is implied in the Western saying "One man's meat is another man's poison," where individual differences are stressed through differentiation. In daily social contacts, this uniformity of viewpoints is shown in the Chinese emphasis on interpersonal relations. People are willing to share personal opinions and offer advice on almost all matters, without the least consideration of their acceptability in practice and in emotion, because these are rarely questioned. Friends or acquaintances will not hesitate to render opinions about what you should wear or how you should talk to or deal with various people, including your own family. Moreover, they will tell you how to live your life, as if it were their own. Such liberties in interpersonal interactions are likely to be regarded in the West as poking one's nose into another's affairs, to say the least. However, in China, these are common, daily interactions at work, at school, and elsewhere (Sun, 1989). Here again, the distinctions between self and others are recognized in both cultures, despite the different meanings and the different associated values. Thus, Chinese in Western countries can, and often do, learn to do as "the Romans do," by readjusting the balance between oneself and one's fellows.

Human and Nature

Hand in hand with the space-unconscious mode is the ego-unconscious mode of mind, resulting in a tendency toward polarization. The world, and everything in it, is seen as a whole with complementary halves: Heaven and earth, earth and sea, human and animal, creature and plant, night and day, sun and moon, death and life, and so forth; naturally, there is no place for individual entities (human or other). Such polar opposite categories, covering all natural objects and phenomena in folk taxonomy, reflect polarities rooted in nature. Other examples are the more abstract

polar opposites such as evil and virtue, devil and god, truth and falsehood, and motion and motionlessness. This complementary principle, known as the opposites of *yin* and *yang* (representing all listed above), is fundamental to all traditional schools of thinking and is especially emphasized by Taoism (Cheng, 1987; Creel, 1953). The Chinese polarization, distinct from the dichotomy familiar to Westerners, is opposed to upholding (either of) the extremes but advocates a balanced, complementary unity of the two to achieve ultimate harmony in the whole. Here again, we see a common ground between the two cultures in the concept of the whole with two halves. The differences lie in where the emphasis is placed: on the halves for the North Americans, and on the whole for the Chinese.

Hierarchies in society are one manifestation of such thinking, which, for thousands of years, has been regarded as natural as the sky and the earth and which should not be questioned.⁹ Just as the sky is above the earth, so is the Emperor, as the Son of Heaven, above all other people on earth, who likewise are dichotomized into nobles and the common people below them, each governed by different sets of *li* (rites/ethical codes), just as day has the sun and night has the moon. This analogy between the natural world and the human world, itself a polar, complementary contrast, is the core of Confucianism (Cai, 1984), an important component of the Chinese cultural tradition. For Confucius, such is the way things should be in order to remain orderly and harmonious.

Another persistent manifestation of polarizing can be found in the position of animals in the Chinese mind. Humans and animals are distinct creatures that are not discussed in the same terms. In the Chinese language, different characters are used to name the sexual differences in humans and animals. Classifiers¹⁰ and pronouns also are distinct for humans and animals. Unlike English, and many other Western languages, where both human and nonhuman organisms are distinguished by the terms *male* and *female* for gender differences, the Chinese language has distinct terms for this in humans versus nonhuman creatures: *nan* (male) and *nü* (female) are for humans, whereas *gong* (male) and *mu* (female), for

example, are for animals. (Use of the latter as attributes for a human is derogative or insulting.) The use of pronouns is similar. Chinese discourse, oral or written, rarely uses a pronoun for nonhuman references; in cases of real necessity, the purpose is served by the pronoun *ta* (it), which writes two entirely different pronouns (*he* or *she*) for humans, in spite of the identical standard pronunciation for all three terms. As a result, use of the personal pronoun for a nonhuman referent, as in some cases in English (e.g., *she* for a ship and *she* or *he*, and even *girl* or *boy*, for a pet), is absurd to a Chinese.

The profound impact of this last polar contrast can be seen in the tradition of good manners. Because animals are part of the external world, the natural environment outside the human, to distinguish humans from animals completely, the natural aspect of human beings, as reflected in emotions, desires, passions, and so forth, must be restrained, while the rational or human aspect is stressed through enforcement of self-control and conformity to standard courtesy, etiquette, and manners in addition to lexical coding. An important component of being human, in contrast to being animal, is the ability to know the way, to have reason. The above mentioned *li* is the criterion, stipulating how one should behave on what occasion to whom and discouraging natural expressions. As a result, the nonverbal bodily or facial expressions in interaction are much more subtle than is the case for North Americans, with the exception that smiles (under particular circumstances) are an important means for expressions of humbleness, friendliness, courtesy, and hospitality that are often required by *li* as good manners. Otherwise, open displays of intense feelings or emotions in social interactions are to be avoided, as such displays are deemed uncivilized. Also frowned upon are touching behaviors or physical closeness in social contacts among adults (for children there are different rules), so that Chinese are classified as belonging to the noncontact culture. This is especially true for physical closeness in interaction, or touching between people of the opposite sex, both of which are seen as signs of sexual behaviors—the most animallike of all behaviors to the Chinese mind. This mentality is clearly expressed in the motto

"Lewdness is the chief of all evils" (*wan e yin wei shou*). North Americans are also listed as a non-contact culture, but for totally different reasons—territoriality and privacy (Watson, 1970).¹¹

Ego and Society

The mode of thinking that presupposes that all share the same viewpoint as parts of the collective whole is called *collectivism* and is typical of Eastern cultures, as opposed to the *individualism* of most Western cultures (Sun, 1989; Triandis, 1989). Status of the person as an independent, unique individual with all the divine rights so natural to North Americans is generally ignored, or almost nonexistent, although not entirely denied recognition, in China (less so now than in the past, but still not categorically different). Folk sayings testify to this: "Gun will shoot the bird that flies higher than others" (*qiang da chutouniao*) and "The rafter that stands out rots first" (*chutoude yuanzi xian lan*). Because *li* and its later variations are criteria for behaviors, those who deviate are exemplars of the higher-flying bird or the out-standing rafter, not tolerated and often sneered at as showing off or punished, as a "horse that brings disgrace to its herd" (*hai qun zi ma*), depending on the extent of his or her perceived damage. The virtue and/or evil of a person is determined according to the benefit to the community from his or her deeds, which often may be nothing more than being nice to others and not disgracing one's parents by deviant behaviors rather than active contributions, so that everybody can get along peacefully and harmoniously, as life is meant to be. Everyone is expected to be concerned about everyone else's business, as if it were his or her own, because everyone is tied together to share the joy of honor or the suffering of shame. It is not surprising that Bond (1983) and Bond and Forgas (1984) discovered that the criterion for trustworthiness in personal judgment for the Chinese is conscientiousness, as contrasted to emotional stability and extroversion for North Americans and Australians.

The collective identity is also realized in the manner of socialization, with *li* and other social conventions not only shared but internalized—the Chinese all have similar expectations of vari-

ous specific settings; explicit reference to expectations is a signal that something is out of order. Children are taught early to follow adults as models and not to ask questions; it is a long-held belief that "examples are better than verbal instructions" (*yanchuan buru shenjiao*). For example, in social contacts, hosts are expected to make guests feel at home, and the visitors are expected to be modest and humble. The best treat for somebody coming home is something good to eat, things that are taken without any question as pleasing to the visitor, because they are such to the host. On the other hand, enjoyment of eating is a behavior closer to that of animals. Thus, a typical scene of visitor-receiving in China is that of the host continuing to offer food while the visitor continues to thank the host for about three or four rounds of persistent offering before partaking. In comparison, the North American host does the asking/offering while the visitors decline, accept, or request an alternative, more or less literally, consistent with the principle of respect for the individual wish.

A tacit understanding among people about specifics in a wide range of typical social situations is such a common phenomenon that it places the Chinese into the category of high context culture (Hall, 1977), which is a manifestation, in the epistemic domain, of the culture's great reliance on first-hand experience (as opposed to information via language codes or logical reasoning) as a base of knowledge and, indirectly, of the polar contrast of human versus nature. The great extent to which social knowledge of a situation is shared, as characteristic of a society with collective consciousness, does not call for verbal explanations of specifics. Thus, typically, students do not ask questions in class about any administrative procedures; they expect to be told whatever they need to know. The teacher knows that an acceptable explanation will follow an absence from class; the students are expected to attend class except for a good reason. Customers are not attended before they ask for help; no one expects or says "thank you" for such small favors as collecting the mail for a neighbor or giving someone information that is needed. Such acts may be seen as the goodwill one should offer to other members of the community, and one can rely on getting the

same from them. Typically such acts are viewed as part of life, unlike a personal favor, as understood in the West.

The emphasis on role of experience in knowledge is the best expression of the nonexpressive/inexpressible in the culture, as captured in Lao Zi's (Lao Tsu) famous saying "He who knows does not speak, he who speaks does not know" (*zhizhe bu yan yanzhe bu zhi*). Here again, we can think of the Chinese brush paintings that present things that can be sensed but not expressed, as is the case for much other knowledge about the world (also see Becker, 1991, and Cheng, 1987, on the Chinese view of language and knowledge). People are expected to take whatever is told them and to repeat and repeat, or practice and practice, until they develop a sense of it through their own experience or discover that it is nonsense. It is not Chinese to prove through pure logical argument; Chinese would seek truth in practice, including social practice bound by conventional wisdom, sometimes not entirely logical. Judged by modern scientific standards, some practices that have been followed for generations in China might seem irrational. The best example is traditional Chinese medicine, which treats with methods from experience accumulated over thousands of years. It has its own theories, which, again, cannot be taught logically but must be learned through experience, under the direction of experienced doctors, and has some practices not explained in (scientific) modern medical theories. However, the Chinese trust it more for its contribution to their overall health, although its effect is certainly slower than that of Western medicine, which is, in Chinese eyes, faster and effective but takes care of only the troubled part—as in the saying "Treat the head when the head aches and treat the foot when the foot hurts" (*tou teng yi tou jiao teng zhi jiao*), meaning treat the symptoms but not the disease. Here we have a good illustration of the holistic, polar, and experience-oriented mode of Eastern thinking, in contrast to the causal, linear, and reason-oriented mode of Western thinking.

Another example of lack of ego in the Chinese mode of thinking, again in sharp contrast to the North American, is the case of children. In the United States, children are little individuals, with things and space that they claim to be their own,

accepted and respected by adults. They prepare for their total independence when they come of age, and they are ready to be "launched." The government and the society see to it that children are not forced in any way against their wills, and in social settings people of different generations interact more or less as equals. An entirely different picture is found in China. In this still patriarchic society Chinese children are treated differently than adults. They are loved and protected, as all young are; however, they are at the lowest level of the family hierarchy, and they remain so as long as the older generation lives. The young should not have an opinion that differs from that which they are told to have by an elder. Instead, everything is decided for them, on the grounds that what is good for the family is good for each member. The elder's choices are for the benefit of everyone, as part of the family.¹² Naturally, the responsibility of the elder for the younger (physical, emotional, financial, social, and so forth) ceases only on their last day of life, as does the obedience of the younger in every possible way—"Filial piety comes before all virtues" (*baixing xiao wei xian*) is the other half of the motto about lewdness mentioned above. The responsibilities of the elder warrant overt expressions of their love and care toward the young: Nothing is more expected than the adult's picking up, hugging, and kissing a child, even if they do not know each other, because such actions express nothing short of kindness and good will, if not love. They embody an extension of the concept of family. Thus, in social settings, children are the most convenient ice-breaking topics.

A final point can be made about the Chinese judicial system, criminal and civil, as a testament to its two-dimensional view. Until some years ago, there were no laws in China, as we know them in the West, where there are social formations that exist only where human behaviors are presumably spatialized and not only measurable for direction (right vs. wrong) but also quantifiable (how much wrong). A legal system reflects the recognition of individuals as equals before the law. For hundreds of years in China, criminal cases, and rare instances of civil conflicts, have been dealt with in a court, which was totally different from that which exists in the United States.

The Chinese court operated on the basis of custom or common sense. The judge was usually a local government chief, supposedly a person of wisdom and reputation, as well as authority. Civil conflicts were settled mostly in the neighborhood or community, with the help of relatives and friends of the parties involved, who mediated according to custom and common sense, getting the parties to see their own deviations from what was expected and/or socially acceptable in particular circumstances, and persuading the parties to come to terms with each other by mending each one's ways. There were no written codes to follow, except for tacit knowledge shared in the society.

Chinese Meeting North Americans

With such discrepancy between the two peoples in the structures of consciousness dominating their thinking it is only natural that they have difficulty understanding each other, even in the most ordinary daily routines. Many Chinese in America were confused the first few times they received a "thanks" from a shop assistant or someone they visited, because they saw no reason for it whatsoever. They found it more peculiar to see family members thanking one another, which to them was akin to thanking oneself: It made no sense. Their first impression, then, was that North Americans were overly polite. Excessive politeness, especially among peers, for Chinese equates with aloofness; it is not a sign of respect for the individual, even in most trivial matters or in an intimate relationship. Similarly, some North Americans visiting China were appalled by the rudeness of the Chinese, who pushed their way in the crowded streets, not stopping to apologize to the pushed (a common scene there that does not bother the natives because they know the pushers are in a hurry, and mean no harm).

A story common to Chinese first visiting the United States is that North Americans are friendly but superficial and absent-minded or forgetful, if not arrogant. Unused to explicitly expressing their feelings, many Chinese were overwhelmed by meeting with North Americans for the first time, impressed or even moved by the latter's hospitality (from the Chinese standard), with many

pleasant verbal expressions (e.g., "I am so glad to see you," "It is a pleasure to know you," "I am so pleased that you came," etc.),¹³ accompanied by rich facial expressions and enthusiastic gestures (e.g., broad smiles, assuring nods, firm handshakes, friendly shoulder-patting). They seemed to be so outgoing, relaxed, and approachable. The Chinese would regard such behavior as an indication of their acceptance into the community. They never would have imagined that their new friends often would have totally forgotten their meeting at some time later. This was a great surprise to the Chinese and a source of deep embarrassment. For people with a collective mode of consciousness, it is, at first, difficult for them to comprehend how one part could no longer know another part of a collective whole in a single existence: One never fails to recognize one's family. With the passage of time, many Chinese came to realize that the basic unit in the North American society is the individual. Then it made sense when things that did not directly concern an individual did not usually get much attention from that person, and that the expressiveness in social interaction was no more than a gesture of respect and goodwill. Such understanding is not possible without the assumption that both cultures recognize the relationship between the part and the whole. On this basis, the Chinese need to make a shift from the whole to the part as the point from which to know North Americans.

Another Chinese impression of North Americans is that they are ready to lend a helping hand, but it is hard to make genuine friendships with them. Many Chinese in North America have experienced timely help from their North American friends. Fellow passengers would take them home for the night and help them find a place to live; people they met would offer all kinds of help or information to solve their settling-down problems. Naturally, these people are considered friends. The term *friend*, however, has different connotations in the two cultures. For the Chinese, it often means someone you know really well, to the extent that you know everything, not only about each other, but about each other's family, past, and present. Note that a typical Chinese way for one to know anything is through experience, which is acquired only in context. In the case of

a person, the context is his or her background in every respect: family, education, job, friends, habits, income, and other parts of personal life. Habitually, the Chinese would expect exactly the same from their new North American friends, to know everything (a rather threatening situation to many North Americans) through typical Chinese chatting with the person involved and with related others. However, they found it difficult to strike up such conversations with many North Americans, who are jealous of their privacy and are not used to casual self-disclosure and other exposure with great detail.

Many North Americans in China have comparable impressions of their Chinese hosts. They find the Chinese friendly and hospitable but too noisy and gossipy. Also, the Chinese way of making them feel at home sometimes "drives them nuts," because they are constantly being asked after their well-being and time and again are offered food, regardless of repeatedly declining. Some feel their host is intrusive, because they rarely have time alone; rather, they always have company to keep them from being "lonely." It is a great breach of etiquette in China to leave a guest alone; this would imply that the visitor is not welcome, the last thing a Chinese would do. The visitor is expected to feel welcome, even at a most "inconvenient moment" to the visited, which by the way is not an original Chinese concept. A genuine Chinese expression would be, even with the most "disliked person," as is consistent with the egoless consciousness, that members of the collective whole would not openly express dislike of such a person because to do so would be to risk their interdependent existence.

To think in perspective is characteristic of North Americans. Reflecting on interpersonal relations in daily life is to see people from many different sides. This puts many Chinese in a quandary. It takes some time for them to discover that North Americans do not usually put people into one of the two categories, kind and unkind (good or bad), as Chinese constantly do with their two-dimensional, polar view of the world. It sounds strange and inconsistent to the Chinese ear that someone can be "kind and not easy to talk to." Consequently, an attribution would often fol-

low that the person making such a statement is insincere, or reluctant to be honest about his or her personal opinion. What matters about a person for Chinese is his or her conscientiousness; thus, besides being kind or unkind, other things about a person are not important enough to be worth mentioning. Here we also trace the mark of lack of ego consciousness: As part of a whole, there is no need for uniqueness in a person, only for a conscience for the collective good. Being kind to fellow human beings promotes harmony (Yum, 1988).

Conclusion

As different as the Chinese culture is from that of North Americans, it has been argued that traditions and values are associated with the most basic dimensions encompassing all aspects of life. Manifestations of different modes of consciousness in different cultures do not come from a void but stem from basic concepts and evolve into traditional or conventional value differences. Traditions and values are two of the many elements of culture that might account for some, but not all, cultural characteristics. They are the most conspicuous aspects of the source of what sets cultures apart phenomenologically, whereas the more fundamental, deeply rooted dimensions are often taken for granted. The acceptance of this position has led to the proposition that, in intercultural communications, communicators from cultures with a different dominant consciousness structure have the potential to understand one another, provided that cultural variations can be put in perspective in light of the basic dimensions of concept. Once on an equal footing at the basic level, the two minds become congruent: They can think in similar terms and see in a similar light.

As in all studies, the foregoing qualitative analysis inevitably reflects the bias of a researcher. However, it presents a point of view accessible to those who would take a particular position similar to this one. Further studies of knowing and intercultural communication can go in several directions. One is to substantiate the model further with more diverse and extensive

empirical data of various cultures in order to demonstrate specific cultural practices as manifestations of modes of consciousness. Efforts to gather evidence of coexisting modes of consciousness in a single culture are especially valuable, because such evidence will have added implications for intercultural education: How different modes are accommodated in a culture may enlighten us about ways of intercultural accommodation and intercultural understanding. Another avenue to examine is specific instances of communication failure in intercultural settings. The aim is to specify the extent to which we can attribute communication breakdown to participants' thinking in different modes. Operating in an invariable mode is at the bottom of such unsuccessful attempts to communicate. The point is to pin down exact points of failure on the epistemic level. Alternatively, successful intercultural interactions can be examined—for example, when interactants can laugh at the same joke—to find the common ground, the underlying epistemic roots that allow us to operate between modes of consciousness.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Communication Association Annual Conference, 1990, Dublin, Ireland. The author thanks Young Kim, William Starosta, Hui-Ching Chang, and Gao-Ming Chen for their constructive comments and suggestions on earlier versions.

1. Other views on this matter, for example the Christian mystic tradition, are excluded, because they are beyond the scope of this discussion.

2. This is evident from various definitions of rhetoric provided by generations of rhetoricians, that it is "the practice of enchanting the soul with words" (Socrates and Plato, 1874), "the art of finding available means of persuasion" (Aristotle, see Jebb, 1909), "the art of effective persuasion" (Cicero, see Clarke, 1963), "the art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end" (Campbell, in Bitzer, 1963), "to apply Reason to Imagination for the better move of Will" (Bacon, see Dick, 1983); and "linguistic description of reality" (Cherwitz & Hikins, 1983).

3. Such as Toulmin (1958, 1972), Scott (1967), and Foucault (1970, 1972).

4. For example, the theory of constructivism by Delia and colleagues (e.g., Delia, 1977, Burlson, 1987) explicitly proffers knowledge following interactions between cognitive structure and external factors. Nevertheless, the theory is often regarded as dealing with personal traits; thus, it is biased toward empiricism. Because their works are part of a collection on personality and communication (McCroskey & Daly, 1987), proponents of the theory were prepared to defend their behaviorist approach against those who favored a phenomenological approach (SCA convention program 1990, pp. 91, 102). On the other hand, this approach is criticized as one of interpretivists, who believe in the human construction of reality (Bostrom & Donohew, 1992).

5. These are subtypes; see Gebser (1985) for a discussion of this. To put it simply, the major five are archaic, magic, mythical, mental-rational, and integral structures. Consciousness within the archaic structure has no sense of time or space but has an internal latency. Consciousness within the magic structure has a sense of natural time but not space and has emotion as the instinctive drive. Consciousness within the mythical structure is aware of both time and space in a two-dimensional sense and is disposed to imagination. Consciousness within the mental-rational structure not only knows the space as it is but also spatializes everything else with rational abstraction. Consciousness within the integral structure manifests a time-free and space-free emphasis, and renders concretion transparent. Features of all types of structures are present in every culture, but one has dominance over the others.

6. About his view of culture as "imagination, the spirit, and inward tendency" governed by the "Tyrannizing Image," see discussions in Foss et al. (1985).

7. The approach here to the Chinese culture is somewhat different from the usual one. Ancient Chinese thinkers are quoted not to discuss their influence on the culture—which they indeed have—but to present them as representative of Chinese thinking, or the Chinese mode of consciousness. These thinkers grew from the cultural soil, and they have, in return, cultivated the culture; the two are interdependent, nourishing each other.

8. The author thanks Drs. Donald Cegala and

William Starosta for bringing this to her attention. Also see Oliver (1971) for a discussion of this in terms of "reciprocity."

9. This is not quite the same in recent decades, as there are indications of a small, but steadily growing, influence of other structures of consciousness (Chen, 1991; Sun, 1989).

10. When modified by numerals, Chinese object nouns must, at the same time, be modified by classifiers following the numeral to designate the category to which the noun belongs. These classifiers are similar to such English lexical items as *piece* and *loaf*, as in "a piece of paper" and "a loaf of bread."

11. Watson neither distinguishes between the cultures of the same category based on the criterion of "contact" nor provides specific rationales for differences in categories, other than differences in tradition.

12. The contemporary young generation enjoys much more independence than ever before; however, the spirit of seniority-superiority is still deeply rooted, as can be seen in the cases of children under the current one-child policy enforced by the government: The main concern of the public is that there will be a whole generation of "spoiled children" who will want to have their own way.

13. Part of the reason may be the Chinese translation of these expressions. Lacking equivalent phatic communion, the Chinese language adds to the literary translations an extra enthusiastic flavor not found in English. However, this sheds light on the status of the individual there: The individual is recognized neither socially nor linguistically. Even phatic expressions in Chinese are of a different topic/nature, usually in the form of a question about the addressee's whereabouts or activities, which are often too inquisitive to a North American's ears.

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KEY TERMS

epistemology	interpersonal communication
consciousness	initial interaction
time	individualism
space	collectivism
ego	
China	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Chen identifies Chinese sayings that reflect a collectivist approach, such as "Gun will shoot the bird that flies higher than others." Can you think of contrasting English sayings that reflect an individualistic orientation?
2. According to Chen, could an ad campaign based on the "time is money" U.S. approach work in China? If not, what kind of approach or persuasive strategies might work?
3. Chen's findings are based on qualitative, interpretive study. How might a social science researcher investigate these same cultural differences?
4. Based on this essay, what advice would you give U.S. exchange students in China about adapting their nonverbal behavior to fit in better in China?
5. Do you think Chinese visitors would have an easier time getting to know people in different parts of the United States? Would regional and urban or rural differences in communication style make a difference?