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ABSTRACT

Mainland China's economy has developed very quickly and has a huge domestic market. Many foreign companies have invested in China without profiting from the investment. Research has indicated that cultural misunderstandings have undermined management effectiveness, and cultural conflicts have even erupted between Mainland Chinese companies and their western subsidiaries. Indeed, western and Chinese companies have many differences in concepts, attitudes and behavior, and western companies operating in China must work to understand those cultural differences. Cultural differences affect leadership behavior, management systems, management effectiveness and, ultimately, organizational performance. This study will conduct a literature review, field study and in-depth interviews with organization CEOs and other experts. The goal of the study is to use the practices of cross-culture human resource management in China from the behavioral point of view in order to offer practical suggestions for western companies that invest in Mainland China. It will also provide principles which will help foreign companies in China to increase their competitive capability.

INTRODUCTION

Culture has long been a major factor in adaptation requirements for inter-organizational integration (Fang, 2001). This has been of special concern in the increasingly global economy of the 21st century. While cross-cultural experience has increased the degree of homogenization toward Western or American management styles, differences have persisted, particularly in subsidiary business operations outside of home countries (Adler, 2000b; Lindholm, 19999/2000).

In the last decade, China became the largest market in the world. It achieved a growth rate of 7.8% in 2002. According to many international investors, the 21st century will be the century of China, just as the 20th century was the century of the United States and the 19th century was the century of Great Britain. The number of firms managed by Chinese people or doing business with China will increase markedly and, with the rapid rise of China as a political and economic power, understanding differences between China and other countries will acquire a special significance. As more American companies do business in China, it will be essential to understand how cultural differences shape the attitudes and behavior of this new market, the Chinese people.

The ability to understand cultural differences and exercise influence in cross-cultural networks is now regarded as an essential qualification of the global manager (Smith & Peterson, 1988). Managers will be more effective if they have strong cultural awareness and know how to influence people with a different cultural background (Fu, 2000).

Statement of the problem

There are hundreds of books about China business in print, but few people outside of the country really understand China. China offers one of the most important contexts for business and management in the world today, but conducting business in China and understanding its culture presents a daunting practical and intellectual challenge.

Significance of the study

China's economy doubles every ten years. More than a billion people will be drawn to the markets of the West. Western business must learn how to cut costs and guarantee a high success rate. It is important to have a general picture about business in China to avoid costly strategic mistakes.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the variables that explain the difference between Chinese people and western people. This study also describes the understanding, knowledge and skills necessary for western companies operating in China and concludes with a short description of culture content and management experience of China.

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REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The world is looking to China, a country that will have great commercial and political significance in the twenty-first century. Research provides some important insights into the Chinese market and investment environment, into the Chinese people, and especially into the Chinese way of doing business. Research is continuing on cross-cultural comparisons of values, management styles, and business practices between Western and Chinese societies.

The need for more culturally-specific knowledge about Chinese human resource has never been greater. Indigenous studies are designed to develop human resource models and instruments that reflect the reality of the Chinese work environment and the concerns of Chinese managers, employees and consumers. The inability to conceptualize many human resource variables properly in the past has cautioned researchers not to regard Western theories and instruments as applicable cross-culturally when, in fact, many of them are culture-specific.

Most researchers have seen the need for an alternative methodology to gain more complete and coherent knowledge about the Chinese people. One way to understand business and managerial behavior—in other words, culture—is to examine the meanings attached to some key words, such as guanxi (relationship), renqing (favor), mianzi (face), fu (compliance), zhong (loyalty), xin (trust) and cheng (sincerity). Those considerations are important elements for designing a human resource model. But what functions do these words serve, how they are used, and how do adaptations of meaning reflect people's experiences? These questions are key for cross-cultural managers.

Liam's recent research explored how the rapid changes in the political, social and economic systems of the People's Republic of China have influenced the HRM system and discussed ways in which the system can best be restructured to meet the changes in the larger environment during the modernization process. Liam posited that it is often difficult to apply Western HRM theories and models in China, and to understand and to predict the possible changes in the Chinese system, because those theories and models were developed on the basis of completely different social-political-historical systems. The indigenous approach he recommends entails searching for first-hand information about the existing Chinese HRM system, rooted in its own cultural beliefs and practices.

Content of Chinese culture

The first step toward developing indigenous human resource theories and models is to have a thorough understanding of the Chinese culture: its value systems, institutional structures, and its ecological systems. Theories and models that have deep roots in these psychocultural foundations are already being worked out. This specialization entails the study of Chinese systems of values and meanings, management philosophies and practices, and their application to organization design and human resource management. Yang's (1998) work on the Chinese self and the relationships amongst face, guanxi, renqing, and interpersonal trust in Chinese social interaction is useful in managing interpersonal relationships in Chinese organizations. Personal relationships and the human side of management are still much more important in China than in the West.

1. Social-oriented

Chinese culture can be characterized as "relationship-oriented" or "social-oriented" (Hwang 2000). Hwang pointed out that Chinese culture and Confucian traditions emphasize authority, order, harmony, loyalty, and personal relationships. Three central characteristics of Confucianism that affect Chinese society are relationship orientation, norms of interaction patterns, and problems and criticism. The Chinese believe that "friendliness is conductive to business success."

According to Hwang, "A person is the center of a unique network composed of his or her social ties. Other persons in this network also have their own reticulum of social relations; hence, the overlapping and intersecting of these reticules results in an extremely complicated network."

Yang (1998) claimed that social orientation is a predisposition toward such behavior patterns as social conformity, inoffensive strategy, submission to social expectations, and worry about external opinions in an attempt to achieve reward, harmony, impression, face protection, social acceptance. At the same time, the Chinese orientation is geared to avoid punishment, embarrassment, conflict, rejection, ridicule, and retaliation.

2. Personal relationships

Personal relationships play a very important role in Asian cultures. Before doing business, Asians have a tendency first to develop personal relationships with their business partners. There is also a tendency to keep

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relations harmonious by not talking directly about problems; confrontations are avoided and human relationships are highly valued in Asian societies. In contrast, personal relationships to the Americans are less important when doing business. American like to get to the point more quickly and directly, even though such an approach may embarrass someone personally and publicly (Huang 2000; Low & Christopher 2000). Low and Christopher also found that some Chinese characteristics are very clear and readily apparent:

1. Trust and mutual respect are important values.
2. Family businesses are still very dominant.
3. Bureaucracy and bribery are still prevalent.

There are constraints on the use of international standard forms of contract in the Chinese construction industry. The Chinese tend to concentrate more on the profit element and other related financial matters, such as credit terms and cash flow arrangements.

Chinese managers emphasize interpersonal relationships more than American managers do, and these relationships provide an important basis for influence. In China, gifts are used to build and strengthen relationships (Fu 2000). Exchanging gifts is a common tradition consistent with the Chinese values of uncertainty avoidance, femininity and long-term orientation. Small gifts are given to people with whom one has a work relationship, as well as to people with whom one has a social relationship. Gifts are given on various occasions and for various purposes, including when one seeks a favor.

In the United States, a gift that is given when seeking a favor or making some requests is often regarded as a bribe. Even the offer or acceptance of a small gift can create the appearance of a conflict of interest. Thus, gifts are likely to be viewed suspiciously by American managers (Fu , 2000; Huang, 2000; Low, 1995).

One of the reasons Chinese people prefer to establish personal relationships is so that "loss of face" can be avoided. In China, the importance of long-term relationships may make managers ambivalent about the effectiveness of using an exchange of gifts because it is complicated in China to determine the appropriate form of exchange. When the recipient is a friend, offering an impersonal exchange or the wrong incentive may cause one or both parties to lose face. When the recipient is not a friend, but future interaction is expected, unconditional gifts and personal favors may be more effective than impersonal exchanges (Fu, 2000).

3. Family loyalty

Low and Christopher (2000) found that traditional Chinese businesses are built around family, and that a family and its bureaucracy usually set up the business. The rules and culture of the business, as well as trade secrets, are often passed down from father to son, so family loyalty is an important component in the Chinese society.

Cultural differences between western countries and China

There are many comparative studies of China and the United States. For example, Smith and Peterson's (1988) research "Leadership, Organizations, and Culture" and Fu's (2000) "Perceived Effectiveness of Influence Tactics in the United States and China" show the two nations' contrasting value systems. Other such works are Bond's (1991) "Beyond the Chinese Face," Gerstner's (1994) "Cross-culture Comparison of Leadership Prototypes," Fu and Taber's (1998) "National Culture Similarities and Differences: A Comparison between the United States and Chinese Managers," Hofstede and Bond's (1988) "The Confucian Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth" and Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, and Terpstra's (1992) "Eastern Value: A Comparison of Managers in the United States, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China."

Hofstede (1983) discussed four dimensions of cultural difference: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. These dimensions show that Chinese communities tend to group-based economies and have a clearer hierarchical structure in their decision process than do Western countries.

Fu (2000) identified the cultural differences between western countries and China from the point of view of perceived effectiveness of influence tactics. First, he found that China and the western countries still differ greatly with regard to their economic systems, political systems, social values, and laws, despite the substantial changes that have occurred in China. Second, he found Chinese managers have value uncertainty avoidance more highly, as they did power distance, collectivism, femininity, and long-term orientation. Third, he described western countries' managers as more individualistic, masculine, short-term oriented, egalitarian, and comfortable with uncertainty. Cultural traditions in the western countries also emphasize competition, pragmatism, democracy, and individualism.

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The strong collective orientation and uncertainty avoidance values in China encourage Chinese managers to use indirect forms of influence that involve the assistance of a third party. Fu and Yuki (2000) found significant differences between American and Chinese managers in a large, multinational company with facilities in both countries. The results were replicated in a second sample, consisting of several organizations in each country. American managers rated rational persuasion and exchange as more effective, while Chinese managers rated coalition tactics, upward appeals, and gifts more effective. The reason for those differences is cultural and philosophical.

Collective and high power-distance countries such as China prized harmony and confrontation avoidance up and down hierarchical structures. In such cultures, appraisal and research into such effects remains minimal (Lindholm 1999/2000).

Chinese philosophy

Recorded Chinese history dates back more than 5,000 years to 2200 B.C. In the history before World War II, there were seven important Chinese dynasties, each with its own background and features. The most important feature in China history is Chinese philosophy, in which there is an abundant supply of wisdom. Indeed, Chinese philosophy is one of the most important parts of Chinese culture and is the first lesson for someone who wants to do business in China. Some businesses have found that Chinese philosophy always provides solutions to questions. Western management principles are often irrelevant from an oriental or Eastern perspective.

Chinese philosophy is gaining a great deal of attention in today's business world, especially in the fields of leadership, motivation, and organization. Administrators are beginning to give more credence to the idea that western approaches are not always necessary to create a competitive advantage. Even when in a western context, some business seem to respond better to including Chinese philosophy in the process.

The thoughts and philosophies of ancient and present-day strategic Eastern thinkers and philosophers have still not been widely circulated, let alone popularized throughout the world. However, with the economic opening up of China and the fast-growing East Asian economy, interest in Oriental thinking and philosophies as they relate to managerial practices has been ignited. Chinese culture has spread its roots into most of the world's countries, especially in East Asia, where the economic success stories of Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Republic of China have been told again and again. Many have suggested that a leading commonality in these countries is the widespread influence of Chinese philosophy in one form or another (Hon 1989).

Confucianism and Taoism

Studies have found that the ability of East Asian entrepreneurs to take full advantage of human capital—be it family loyalty, a disciplined work force, or a support staff—ais not an accident: They are beneficiaries of the Confucian and Tao way of life (Tu, 1989). Confucian values ensure social justice and stability. Tu (1989) pointed out that the Confucian dimension in the East Asian development model can be summed up in three interrelated areas of concern: (1) the style of political leadership, (2) the pattern of social interaction, and (3) the path to success.

Other notable philosophers include Lao Tzu,, Sun Tzu , Mencius and Chuang Tzu, all of whose teachings have had a tremendous influence on Chinese civilization and society. Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching is well known as a life compass in the Chinese world. Sun Tzu's Art of War, an ancient Chinese military treatise written some 2500 years ago, has been modified to apply to today's business management and marketing problems (Low, 1995).

According to Zhang(1985), Chinese philosophy has the following characteristics: (1) the unity of knowing and acting; (2) the unity of heaven and man; and (3) the unity of truth and the good. Unity and Oneness, then, can be seen as the main characteristics of Chinese philosophy.

Guan-Xi and Mian-Zi

Cultural beliefs and traditions are also a major part of the culture of the Chinese people. Examples include the principles of "Guan-Xi" (relatedness or connections among sets of individuals) and "<ian-Zi" (maintaining face by keeping the respect of others and showing respect for them), which originated in Confucianism. The Chinese prefer to work with people they know and trust. The right "Guan-Xi" will make all the difference in ensuring business success as helps to maintain harmony in the Chinese society. Because of Guan-Xi, Chinese managers like to consult and act collectively. According to Buttery, Guan-Xi is driven by deep-rooted cultural beliefs stemming from the teachings of Confucius and from the pragmatic demands of living in fairly self-supporting communities.

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Mian-Zi is another important feature in China. Mian-Zi is the Chinese concept of giving "face." Liang (2001) pointed out that Main-Zi translates into giving one's respect and recognizing the status and moral reputation of Chinese society. Face—also defined as status, ego, or self-respect—can be saved or lost in China. "Saving face" is about avoiding looking stupid or being forced to back down in front of others. (Liang, 2001).

American managers prefer to use direct language and approaches. In contrast, the strong collective orientation and uncertainty-avoidance values in China encourage Chinese managers to use indirect forms of influence that involve the assistance of a third party. In Fu and Yuki's (2000) research, significant differences were found between American and Chinese managers in a large, multinational companies with facilities in both countries. The results were replicated for second sample consisting of several organizations in each country. American managers rated rational persuasion and exchange as more effective than did Chinese managers. On the other hand, Chinese managers rated coalition tactics, upward appeals, and gifts more effective. The basic reason for those differences is culture factors, especially philosophy difference.

WU-Lu

Chinese people attach a great deal of importance to "Wu- Lu" in daily life. In Chinese lore, five-cardinal human relationships (Wu- Lu) are characterized: that between sovereign and subordinate, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, spouse and spouse, and friend and friend. To a Confucian, all human relationships in the society can be derived from one or combination of these five fundamental relationships. In essence, Confucian teaching underscores a harmonious and orderly organism. People are encouraged to maintain hierarchical order and harmonious interpersonal relationships within a relatively stable and permanent social fabric (Huang 2000).

Generally speaking, human resources research has generally followed a Western or American model; therefore, the research on inter-cultural human resource management styles in non-Western organizations has been limited. Cross-cultural human resource management has been demonstrated to have had a significant positive impact on such areas as job satisfaction, so retention and turnover rates in overseas subsidiaries have dropped. Pena's studies (2000) showed that turnover could be the cause of substantial human resources costs for organizations.

METHOD

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered from five branches of a western company with a presence in China. At each branch, approximately 20 employees and 10 managers were randomly selected from an employee list provided by the human resources department, so a total of 150 employees were selected as participants in the study. A self-administered questionnaire was developed that combined the entire Work Preference Inventory (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey & Tighe, 1994) and an adapted version of the Asian Values Scale (AVS) (Kim, Atkinson & Yang, 1999). The sample of employees was 68% male and 32% and females. 85% of the employees were between the ages of 20 and 40. A total of 50 top managers participated in the study. Branch managers provided information on the cost of human resource usage and profitability for each branch. The study conducted extensive interviews with managers and asked them to indicate possible sources of cultural conflict while managing Chinese employees. Interviews were conducted through the use of the Chinese tri-lingual manager, so their results include the possibility of an implied alliance between the researcher and the company management.

CONCLUSION

This study consists of a literature review, expert interviews, field study and in-depth interviews with organization employees in order to examine the impact of local needs while conducting business in China. The material in this paper will help businesses to improve their perceptions and assumptions by enlightening the reader through increased wisdom and compassion, encouraging better cross-cultural awareness, and curing the problems of culture shock. International managers must realize that, while certain forms of communication are acceptable in one country, they may be taboo in another.

Cross-Culture Awareness

Cultural differences were manifest in several areas. The Chinese managers indicated that they were unwilling to express their ideas directly, preferred to avoid face-to-face conflict, and are uncomfortable with "straight talk." On the other hand, the Western employees were more direct in their speech, more emotional in their outlook, more social and more accepting of direct conflict. According to the Mexican managers, face-to-face conflict

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was acceptable in the interactions among the Mexicans, but never between the Mexicans and the Chinese, regardless of the level of the personnel involved. This dichotomy had, according to the managers, resulted in increasing tension with the organization.

Adler (2001) posited that, in many overseas subsidiaries, the largest portion of working hours was spent integrating cultural differences, rather than in actual work performance. Adler stated that cross-cultural teams could be more productive than uni-cultural teams if the diverse teams recognized their differences and did not allow one of the cultures to dominate the other. Such cultural domination may have been the result of an overwhelmingly disproportional numbers of employees from one of the countries, or from a hierarchy such as that resulting from a home-office/subsidiary dichotomy.

One of the cultural factors of concern in the interviews was the potential application of Hofstede's (1984) power distance dimension to the bi-cultural organization. The fit between cultures with home-office/subsidiary organizations was particularly sensitive to the management practice of employee empowerment, a practice directly linked to the power distance preference differences of the diverse cultures. In cultures that embody high power distance preferences, the concept of empowerment was in an antithetical position to the cultural preference for inequality in authoritarian structure. However, research has found that there is no significant correlation between empowerment and employee satisfaction in either the US or Mexico (Marchese, 2001).

As a high power-distance country, Chinese workers expected, and were more comfortable when, authority figures did not cede power in the decision-making or management processes (Adler, 2000a). Lindholm's (1999/2000) research indicated that, because of the preference for high power-distance in such cultures, the potential negative implications of Western preference for empowerment needed to be considered carefully. While the practice of PM assessment would be seen as generally more easily embraced by management than by line operations employees (Lindholm, 1999/2000), the high power-distance culture of China would be expected to be less accepting of the process than would the more individual and low power-distance countries such as the U.S.

Another of Hosfede's (1984) dimension, individualism versus collectivism, was directly related to the concept of individual or shared responsibility and reward in the workplace. The degree to which a culture internalized the primacy of the individual over the group (or the degree of "I-ism" versus "We-ism") had implications for the adaptation capability of MNC management styles on host country subsidiary success. In China, as in most countries in East Asia, collectivism was the preferred orientation (Zhu, Chen & Warner, 2000).

Chinese Philosophy concepts

Chinese philosophy is basically an ethical philosophy; if the modern term "existential" is applied to it, it becomes "do the right thing in the right place" (Zhou 1995). Chinese philosophy indicates that one should bear in mind local needs and possibilities while doing business in China. The Taoist school also pointed out a clear path to Tao: If one knows where to stop, one has stability. If one has stability, one can be tranquil. If one is tranquil, one can be at ease. If one is at ease, one can deliberate. If one can deliberate, one can attain one's aims. Things have their roots and branches, affairs have their ends and beginnings. When one knows what comes first and what comes last, then one is near the Tao.Chinese philosophy, the literature review and the research interviews in this study lead to some important clues for doing business in China:

Because relationship orientation, the existence and the strength of the Quan-Xi are the most important questions that Chinese people will ask when doing business. Under Quan-Xi, when a man gets to the top, all his friends and relations get there with him. Finding your Quan-Xi with a Chinese business will get things done more quickly.

Chinese don't often show much emotion when they do business, and they don't often speak directly. The Chinese people may look foolish to western eyes in this regard, but still waters run deep. It takes time to figure out what Chinese are thinking. Just because they are silent or indirect does not mean they are not thinking deeply. Making assumptions is always a bad idea. Because of care about lose of face, tough messages are best conveyed through a third party. Chinese don't fight against impossible odds; they always save the situation by making some concessions. Chinese people always keep on good terms with everyone to ensure harmony all around. It is the spirit of Confucianism is "judge others by oneself" and "convince people by sound argument." Chinese people always try peaceful means before resorting to force when they are in business. When working in a foreign country, it is necessary to bear in mind local needs and possibilities. An American may not hit it off with a Chinese person, and

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foreigners are of no help in communicating if they don't speak Chinese. The worst candidate for helping with China venture is the individual who claims to know China because he was born in there, but has not been there for 20 years. Liang (2001) pointed out some useful tips that can be applied to business contact with the Chinese:

(1) Do build up good relationship inside and outside the company through social events.
(2) Do host an outstanding dinner and negotiate the business deal over the dinner.
(3) Do remember to bring a gift when you are visiting people at home.
(4) Don't cause people to "lose face" by pointing out mistakes publicly.
(5) Don't appear to make quick decisions.
(6) Encourage challenges and questions during training, which works efficiently in Chinese people's social lives.

Because of Wu-Lu, Chinese students do not encourage questions and challenge the instructor, but encouraging challenges and questions during training are good way for the Chinese to learn. Anyone who wishes to do business in the East should take note of these issues if projects are to be completed on time and within cost, quality, and environmental specifications. One could not expect Chinese philosophy to be acceptable in its entirety by western-trained managers or to work exceedingly well in a western setting because of cultural and historical differences. It would be ideal if western management wisdom could be integrated with Chinese philosophy. To this purpose, Lao Tzu and Confucius provided wisdom that will enhance western leadership and management styles to be more effective in an Oriental setting: "Water drips and, given time, will drill a hole in granite." In other words, persistence and patience pay off in the long run. When you want to do business in China, first try to understand the people, and to be understood. Add some patience and persistence, and you will very well likely be on your way to success. Many international companies were optimistic for Chinese market opportunities in the early 1990s. They rushed to make investments and hoped to share in this large, last new market in the world. After this initial hot period, however, their optimism was replaced by realism. Before they came to China, they did not know Chinese culture and they came to realize how difficult it is to do business in China without knowing the culture. China does not constitute a single market, any more than do Texas and New York or Peoria and San Francisco. In China, the environment, culture, living and even language reflect regional differences; he market is different among the provinces and even within each province. However, while there are many different markets in China, they are all ruled by Chinese culture. Thus, it is impossible for western management so succeed in China without knowing its culture. To do business with the Chinese, one must learn what and how the Chinese think. Since Chinese culture is abundantly rich, it merits deep and extensive study from those who would plumb its riches.

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