

Introduction

China and America are two countries that are involved with a lot of trade not only with each other but also with the rest of the world. They are also big countries both economically and in size. Citizens in China speak Chinese while those in the U.S.A speak English. Both countries have cultures, etiquette and manners that might work towards the up grading or downfall of their business practices.

Cultural practices are all over the world but are diverse depending on the country in question. The differences in cultures and etiquette may act as a major hindrance in the business world. Differences in culture can hinder the smooth flow of trade and even completely cripple it if it is not looked into and a solution found.

Two countries trading with each other must be able to communicate and come to an understanding of how they will settle their differences if they want to do business with each other and with the rest of the world too. Cultures should be there to strengthen the countries but not to weaken or act as a hindrance.

This paper will look into how each cultural activity has played a role in improving or deteriorating their business activities. It will also give ways in which some hindrances can be improved depending on how willing the countries are ready to improve their trading (Burton, 2005).

Cultural Issues

Citizens in China speak Chinese while those in the U.S speak English. These two languages have no similarities at all thus becoming hard to understand each other especially if each party decide to speak their own languages. Many business people in China have learnt to speak English therefore doing business has been much easier. However, there might be problems arising even if both parties are talking the same language. A lot of misunderstandings may come up if both parties are not careful. Chinese English is mostly influenced by their native language and therefore they mostly mispronounce some of the words and especially those with 'r'. For example, a Chinese businessman might tell an American businessman "I sell flesh liver stones". If the other party is not careful, they might get the wrong information for what the businessman means is "I sell fresh river stones".

There are other forms of miscommunications depending what a certain phrase means or which type of English one was taught. The American English is not quite the same as the Briton English. There are phrases and words that are not the same and might mean a completely different meaning if not well used. Business deals are not crossed most of the times due to poor communications. Chinese are slower than the Americans in terms of crossing out deals for they first like to know the other parties and to make sure that they can be trusted. Americans are much faster. A slowness in speech can be felt in some of the businessmen especially those who are not fluent in English hence a lot of patience is needed.

Most Chinese were taught English in class and so they might not be aware of other forms of words that can be used to give the same meaning as a certain word. For example, soccer is also known as football to others although football is a completely different game in the U.S. one can just say "stop talking rudely" instead of saying "stop talking crap". It is important to keep it simple so that there can be no miscommunication or misunderstanding.

The Chinese have a habit of saying 'yes' to show that they are attentive to what one is saying but not necessarily to agree with what one is saying. This can be easily misunderstood as this means that one has agreed with the other party in the U.S. it is good to understand such kinds of habits so that there is no misunderstanding.

While the Americans like to keep eye contact to show that they are concentrating and attentive, the Chinese avoid this as it is a sign of arrogance, defiance or disrespect. This is normally avoided when one is speaking to their seniors or a person of a higher authority. The Chinese should be able to understand the American way and know that they are just showing that they are concentrating and the Americans should also understand the Chinese and know that they are concentrating even without looking at them (Thanasankit, 2003).

The Americans are used to speaking out fast. This might be a disadvantage to them when they are speaking to a Chinese for they like it slow. They might also lose their audience and so lose out on a great idea a party had. Being slow does not mean that one is dumb or slow to learn. It can only be the way the other party likes things done. Being casual makes one comfortable and free with the other party but this might be a disadvantage especially if being casual is considered as rude. Chinese like it official and only childhood friends or long time friends are allowed to call each other by their first names.

Chinese have the habit of exchanging business cards after their meeting or after greetings. This can be taken as an offense by one who does not know about this culture. Americans prefer to first know each other and then offer their business cards at a much later time. This puts the Chinese at an advantage as one gets to know what they do at an earlier time. Though it might look as though they are only interested in doing business with the other party, it is not so. In fact, they are very good at creating long term relationships. The exchange of business cards is just a way of letting the other party know more about them.

In the U.S, deals can be crossed within a very short time which is an advantage as they get to cross many of them. The relationships between the two parties might not be as strong for it might be purely a business relationship. This is also a disadvantage as long term relationships might not be formed. This leads to short term relationships that only end when the deal is finished. However, the Chinese do not make very quick deals as they first like knowing the party or parties they are dealing with and then finally settling down to do business. They are more conservative and they do not like revealing too much about themselves. This does not mean that the Americans just go and spill out everything about them; it just means that the Chinese are much slower than the Americans.

It is always good to cultivate what is known as "guan xi" in China. This means connections. Knowing people and making connections first before entering into business with them is very important to the Chinese. Turning up with legal documents on the first or the second day of a meeting might not be very good if one wants to be in business with a Chinese. It is always good to get to know people first as this might show that one is more interested in the person more than just doing business with them (Peterson, 2004).

The Chinese do not like to be pushed and so it is not advisable to get them to tell you what they do not want to tell. The good thing about them is that once they establish a relationship with a party, it will go much further than being just a business relationship. The relationship might also last a very long time.

This can be a disadvantage to a party that is impatient and wants to strike a deal as soon as possible. The understanding of each culture is important and should enable a party reach out to the other party in order to make good business relationships (Walker, Walker, & Schmitz, 2003).

Different colours have different meanings depending on the culture in question. In the U.S, colour white signifies peace and is worn during weddings as a sign of purity while the same white signifies mourning and sorrow in the Chinese culture. Red signifies prosperity, power and authority in the Chinese culture while the same colour might not be so pleasing being worn to a business meeting especially by a man. A man wearing a green hat in public in the Chinese culture means that his wife is being unfaithful which is quite embarrassing to do in public. An understanding of such simple details is very important as one might pass the wrong message without their knowledge. No one wants to offend the other party especially on the first day of talking business. Both parties might try and look for a neutral colour that does not pass an absurd message to the other or even worse still, make the other party uncomfortable and offended (Shenkar & Luo, 2008).

People do different things as a sign of appreciation. Most people may prefer to do someone a favour while others may prefer to offer gifts. It is important to know what a certain gift signifies to the other party before giving them. For example, offering a Chinese a clock, signifies that you want to attend their funeral which of course is not the message that one wants to pass. In the U.S, it is not very advisable to give one lingerie unless you are very close and very free with the other party. This is normally done when one wants to create a romantic mood or in bridal showers. It is alright to give them a wrist watch but do not offer a clock.

Some behaviors might look indecent when done in certain places while to others they are just normal. For example, Chinese are used to smoking such that they smoke a third of the cigarettes produced in the world. If a Chinese starts smoking in the middle of a business meeting, it is only a way of relaxing and they might even listen to you longer. This might not be the case in with the Americans as it might be interpreted as a sign of rudeness. If a Chinese offers a cigarette, it is only advisable to just turn down the offer but do not start giving lectures about the disadvantages of smoking. On the other hand, if an American feels offended, when the cigarette is lit in the middle of a discussion, putting it off for a short period of time will not do much harm (Ambler, Witzel & Xi, 2008).

While Americans are not as superstitious as they look at this as old age beliefs which are not real, the Chinese are very superstitious. It is important that the Americans respect their way of life and learn more about the superstitions that might offend or hinder doing business with them. This will ensure the smooth flow of doing business with both parties.

With today's technology, there are transactions that are done online without any one on one meetings. This has made many business transactions happen especially in the U.S and other countries. However, this is not the case with the Chinese. They prefer having one on one meetings with all the people they are working with. They also prefer to speak out their problems when there are not too many people around (Bucknall, 2002).

This will help one get to know them better. This is not the case with the Americans as they can easily shoot up their questions, problems or ideas in front of a large audience. The Chinese are more secluded and do not like a lot of publicity and that is why pushing a lot for answers that they do not want to give may not be such a very good idea. They open up at their own pace, wish and time depending on how they have known you.

It is always advisable to stay behind after one has talked with a large Chinese audience instead of rushing out to the next meeting or appointment. Staying behind will give the ones who were not ready to ask questions or give any ideas publicly a chance to open up to you. According to many, this staying behind has enabled many to make very good business deals or at least get good business ideas. There are times that they prefer to pull someone aside and so, do not get offended (Stone, 2005).

Conclusion

It is good to understand the other party's culture and adjust where necessary without compromising each others cultures and beliefs. Business must be done across borders and so some of these cultural hindrances can be looked into. It is advisable that the Americans and the Chinese learn each others culture so that the smooth flow of trade and business can continue.

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