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Ethical Intercultural Technical Communication: Looking through the Lens of Confucian Ethics

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Studies of intercultural communication focus little on the ethical principles that inspire specific communication practices. The ethics of Confucius (including the virtues of goodness, righteousness, wisdom, faithfulness, reverence, and courage), however, genuinely illuminate communication behaviors within China. Analysis of a cultural artifact of technical communication reveals the substantial insight offered by the lens of ethics. A comprehensive understanding of differences in ethical perspectives is necessary to achieve ethical intercultural technical communication.

Given the collapse of communism and the geographical expansion of capitalism and democracy, more and more organizations have committed themselves to developing their international potential. Today's technical communicator, as a consequence, is often a multicultural, intercultural communicator engaging issues of translation, interpretation, and localization. In this situation, however, is a potential peril for technical communicators because little research or guidance is available to identify the practices of ethical intercultural technical communication.

Ordinarily, the research on intercultural communication does a good job of encouraging a sensitivity to international audiences, chiefly by isolating communication behaviors that reveal cultural differences (e.g., Alred; Artemeva; Boiarsky; Forman; Hagen; Rodman; Ulijn) and by describing various coarse filters (such as "high context" versus "low context") for categorizing disparate cultures (e.g., Hall; Hofstede; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck; Trompenaars; Varner and Beamer). This research is a necessary starting point for appreciating the diverse practices that might disrupt intercultural communication but elides the philosophical perspectives that inspire such practices (Irwin 58-59). For example, we might observe that Chinese people

give and receive business cards using both hands, answer a compliment with a denial (e.g., "No, I am really a poor writer"), are "indirect" in their style of speaking and writing, or have a "collectivist" culture, but still unexplained in this listing and sorting are the ideals driving and unifying their communication behaviors. And if we simply acquiesce to sporadic insights and polarizing categories, Chinese culture and Chinese writers and readers will always be to us curious, mysterious, and foreign. To achieve effective and ethical intercultural technical communication, I believe, requires of us the heavy lifting of studying and explicating the ethics of individual civilizations.

In this article, I try to exemplify the tighter and crisper focus that I believe is necessary to advance research on intercultural technical communication. Specifically, I look at the ethics of China. I start by explaining the diversity of Chinese philosophy and proceed to offer a basic introduction to Confucian thought and the virtues that according to Confucius constitute ethical behavior. I also briefly discuss opposing philosophies. I conclude by analyzing a salient artifact of intercultural communication according to Confucian ethics. I believe this analysis demonstrates that Americans and Chinese come to the subject of ethics from different perspectives and that unless we develop a comprehensive understanding of such differences, effective and ethical communication is unlikely to occur.

The Chinese Philosophical Tradition

Unlike the United States with a heritage that is chiefly Judeo-Christian, China adopts a philosophical perspective that is primarily Confucian or Neo-Confucian. (See also Tu's brief history of Confucianism, including the contributions of such major thinkers as Mencius, Hsun Tzu, and Chu Hsi.) Please keep in mind, however, that multiple schools of thought operate in China, such as Taoist, Buddhist, Maoist, and anti-Confucian (rejecting Confucian philosophy as a barrier to progress and looking to European and American ideals). Little is monolithic or homogeneous to China, and no single philosophy could identify or explain all of China's distinguishing characteristics. With 1.3 billion people, virtually every generalization is a sweeping generalization that likely omits at least 10% of the population (i.e., the equivalent of 50% of the population of the United States).

Nevertheless, Chinese philosophy is almost always a practical vehicle for self-realization or self-cultivation. Human beings are considered capable of attaining perfection, without divine intervention, within a process that proceeds from perfection of the individual to perfection of the world, from personal improvement to social and political efficacy (Cheng 85): "individuals are endowed with innate capacities to transform themselves and induce the transformation of others in the domain of moral relationships and moral virtues" (Cheng 26).

I would emphasize, however, that Chinese people are, like all people, neither always ethical nor always meticulous in their philosophy or practice of ethics. Grievous economic and political conditions encourage a survivor's mentality, and immorality is often justified as necessary or appropriate because society itself is immoral (De Mente 96). It is thus impossible to promise that a specific individual within a specific situation will be chiefly motivated by a specific ethical perspective: it is only possible to describe the potential influence of ethics on the individual's communication behaviors. (See also Yuan's caution on the serious limitations of emphasizing intercultural communication versus individual communication.)

The Ethics of Confucius

To Confucius (i.e., Kong Fuzi or Master Kong), the ethical individual cultivates and exercises several key virtues, chiefly goodness (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), faithfulness (*xin*), reverence (*jing*), and courage (*yong*). This cultivation and exercise of virtue is achieved through obedience to the rituals (*li*), specific traditions regarding virtually all human behavior, from the etiquette of eating and drinking to the propriety of family relations and the operations of political institutions (Huang 20). Confucius also emphasizes the individual's social relations and social responsibility over self-consciousness: people perceive themselves according to their social relationships and responsibilities as opposed to their individual being. Ethical action is only possible within a society, in the relationships among people (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 71-72).

Goodness

Goodness (benevolence, love, or humanity) is the most important of the virtues. Ethical individuals desire for others that which they desire for themselves, treating others as they would like others to treat them. The goodness offered to others is determined, however, according to the benefits one has received from others. Thus, the obligation to one's mother and father (who have given life itself) exceeds one's obligation to brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, city and country (Lau 18-19).

The hierarchy of relationships thus has clear levels: family, colleagues, friends and neighbors, and indirect relationships (e.g., the sister of one's neighbor) (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 43-44). Family, however, always has priority.

This definition of goodness inspires Chinese society to operate on a rule of people exercising benevolence instead of a rule of law. Morality is perceived as superior to legality: rule by people preserves the humanity of society whereas rule by law is mechanical (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 155-56).

Individuals with whom Chinese people have an existing relationship will thus usually be preferred to those who are strangers. Fairness (or being ethical) requires Chinese people to give special privilege to family and friends. Treating all people the same (family and friends as well as strangers) would be to ignore the goodness received from family and friends: treating all people the same, as a consequence, would be unfair and unethical. Thus behaviors that foreigners might interpret as either prejudice or favoritism, Chinese people perceive as the simple exercise of goodness (Yum 378-79).

In doing business in China, for example, foreigners are likely victims of the virtue of goodness because Chinese people are disposed to privilege Chinese friends (or friends of friends) as opposed to foreigners (Tung 239-41). It is not impossible to penetrate the concentric circles of obligation, but it is important that foreigners realize that they start on the outside circle, that it will take them considerable time and effort to work toward the center, and that they will never arrive at the center (because it is occupied by family).

To do business in China, nevertheless, requires the ethical positioning of oneself as a friend instead of a stranger. Communication in China, as a consequence, is often considered "indirect" by foreigners because initial attention is dedicated to the establishing of a personal relationship among the parties to a business transaction. A meeting or a letter, for example, might start with discussion of family or social pursuits prior to addressing pertinent business issues. To Chinese people, this practice is ethical.

The virtue of goodness is also inextricably linked to food in Chinese society.

In the United States, the foundation of goodness is the right to individual liberty, especially through the virtually unrestricted exchange of ideas. A good government, for example, provides its people individual liberty. In China, however, it is the right to food that ordinarily drives the ethical agenda, and all other rights are subservient to this principle: that is, the function of political institutions is to promote the good of the people, starting with the food necessary to nourish life itself.

This difference in definitions of goodness is a consequence of geography. In the United States, the land is fertile and crops are plentiful; food is abundant and efficiently distributed. In China, however, the territory is huge, but the land itself is chiefly deserts and mountains: habitable land is small (De Mente 2) and is itself subject to periodic flooding. In China, 1.3 billion people live and die and raise their crops and chickens and pigs on land that is roughly the size of the continental United States—east of the Mississippi River.

China's priority is thus the human right to food, to life as opposed to liberty. (I offer no excuse for the genuine abuses of human liberty that plague China, but it is also important to acknowledge the emphasis on a different human right.) Food—its acquisition, preparation, and consumption—is a chief focus of Chinese attention, unlike

Americans who assume that food will be readily available and who proudly claim the invention and worldwide dissemination of fast-food restaurants. (The popularity of such restaurants must be understood, in part, as a sign of prosperity—a visible demonstration that individuals and peoples never have to occupy themselves with the acquisition and preparation of food. And genuine liberty can be understood, in part, as liberation from continuous anxiety over the acquisition of food.)

The virtue of goodness, however, also has negative influences on Chinese society. The ethical obligations to parents and grandparents lead to a respect for age and seniority over intelligence, initiative, and ingenuity, creating a more conservative society (De Mente 85-86). And though the ideal is a pliable exercise of benevolence, a rule of people is easily corrupted by the avaricious, the despotic, and the arbitrary (De Mente 160).

Righteousness

The moral philosophy of Confucius espouses *yi*, righteousness or propriety, as the chief criterion of human behavior, as a "guiding principle in all human relations" (Huang 5). Righteousness is consistently doing the right thing, choosing morality over profit or success, trying only to be as good a man or woman as possible without regard for fortune or reward in this or any other possible life.

The virtue of righteousness constitutes "the fundamental principle of morality" as it "forms the necessary component of a virtuous life and restrains the inclinations towards material goods and desires of pleasure and comfort" (Cheng 234).

Righteousness asks the individual to derive significance from a specific situation, integrating the individual and his or her circumstances, to determine ethical action (Hall and Ames 96):

> *Yi* has normative force without itself actually constituting a norm. The actions that realize *yi* are not performed in accordance with strict guidelines. . . . This means that *yi* is as much the consequence of a particular decision or action as its cause. The normative force of *yi* exists in spite of its inchoate character at the beginning of *yi* acts. The articulation of *yi* with respect to a given situation involves the emerging awareness of what is or is not appropriate in that situation and how one might act so as to realize this appropriateness in its highest degree. (Hall and Ames 102)

Righteousness also inspires the rituals (*li*), the 300 major rules and 3000 minor rules regarding appropriate behavior. The rituals are "patterns of behavior initiated and transmitted in order to refine and enhance life in a community" (Hall and Ames 89). The rituals are thus the heuristics of righteousness: "A person in learning and reflecting upon these ritual actions seeks in them the *yi* contributed by his precursors, and in so doing, stimulates, develops, and refines his own

sensitivities" (Hall and Ames 99). Social practices and traditions such as the exchange of greetings or business cards, the giving of gifts, and the offering of food or drink to guests possess genuine ethical implications. Each is a vehicle for self-cultivation and the exercise of righteousness.

According to Confucius, superior human beings (*chün-tzu*) are motivated by righteousness and inferior people by profit. The tension of righteousness versus profit encourages a denigration of business people and a veneration of the political and academic professions (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 30-33). Emphasis on business is considered a necessary but obvious moral degeneration (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 166).

In business transactions, morality over profit is the ideal: buyers want a low enough price so that they may buy all the things they need, but sellers want a high enough price so that they may cover their expenses, buy the things they need themselves, and buy more things to sell. Righteousness is the balance between the buyer's needs and the seller's needs; righteousness is always considering the opposing perspective and trying to achieve a situation in which both sides are satisfied (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 191-92).

Greed and glory, as a consequence, are inappropriate as motivators. Money is earned and success is sought chiefly for the benefit it can bring to your family and friends—to fulfill the ethical obligations of goodness. That is, it would be unethical to encourage selfish desires: "If we do business together, you will make a lot of money and be able to buy yourself a fancy new sports car." But espousing the exercise of goodness would be ethical: "If we do business together, you will make enough money to afford the finest schools for your children."

Self-promotion, similarly, is considered unethical. Righteousness dictates that people be modest regarding their abilities and achievements. The writing of a résumé or letter of job application, for example, is a rhetorical activity of obvious delicacy. In a job interview, if a Chinese candidate is asked if he or she is a good teacher, the ethical answer despite years of education and experience is "No, I am still learning to be a teacher."

In addition, compliments are ordinarily received with denials. The ethical answer to "You are doing a good job" is "No, I make a lot of mistakes" or "No, I could do better" because glory, however gratifying or merited, is itself never a righteous objective. You do a good job for neither praise nor profit, but because it is the ethical thing to do. A sincere compliment, nevertheless, deserves repetition following the denial: "No, I don't see mistakes. You are doing a good job."

The negative impact of righteousness on Chinese society, however, is the possibility of blind obedience to the rituals. The denigration of business also has the potential of driving ethical people from the field and leaving it to the unscrupulous.

Wisdom

Wisdom is the key to self-improvement. It is achieved through learning, with schooling considered superior to experience. Formal education and degrees thus offer a higher level of authority and credibility relative to on-the-job experience (Lau 23). Education is a vehicle for understanding right behavior: it has less to do with the acquisition of knowledge and more to do with the cultivation of morality (Leys xxix). It also has a lot to do with identifying the things you know and admitting the things you still have to learn (Lau 23).

Confucius identifies four levels of people: at the highest level is the extraordinary individual with innate knowledge, followed by the individual who studies to avoid making mistakes, the individual who studies after making mistakes, and the individual who never studies after making mistakes (Lau 23).

Of all wisdom, the most critical is a knowledge of people (i.e., being a good judge of character) because human behavior is the chief variable in one's preparation for the future (Lau 22). Instruction in the humanities, as a consequence, is considered superior to investigation of science and engineering (Huang 11).

This definition of wisdom also has a negative side, equating education and moral superiority. The privileging of the humanities also has the potential to divert creativity and ingenuity to artistic purposes only and thus slow scientific and technological progress.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness or trustworthiness is matching one's words (*yan*) with one's deeds (*xing*), thus establishing both credibility and reliability. Failure to deliver on a promise is thus a failure of morality. The ethical individual, as a consequence, is slow to speak and never makes claims or promises until a deed is already or almost accomplished (Lau 25).

In business negotiations, for example, the Chinese will ordinarily resist making promises or commitments, especially in the absence of a previous or existing relationship. In contracts and proposals, similarly, the Chinese will hesitate to specify budgets and schedules, but consider it easier to detail their track record on earlier projects.

Eloquence is also distrusted, and a rhetoric of the implicit is privileged (Leys xxx). The ethical communicator is thus advised to "say what you need to say, not what you want to say" (Huang, Andrulis, and Chen 167). While loquacious foreigners might perceive themselves as candid and gregarious, for example, the Chinese could interpret their behavior as inanity or insincerity. Brevity, however, isn't necessarily virtuous: the "direct" style of writing practiced by Americans—getting straight to the point without polite socializing—is obviously succinct, but omits the humanizing information that the Chinese consider crucial to a working relationship.

The risk to Chinese society of this virtue of faithfulness, however, is passivity. In the desire to prove credible and reliable, the timid individual might neither speak nor act, neither promise nor deliver. By thus doing nothing, he or she does nothing wrong.

Reverence

Reverence or seriousness is "moral alertness" (Cheng 50) or awareness of one's social responsibilities and a sincere devotion to discharging one's responsibilities. Self-cultivation through schooling, for example, is a conscientious pursuit of manifest intensity: it is the individual's necessary contribution to his or her community. Service to family, friends, supervisors, and officials, similarly, inspires the highest levels of dedication and diligence. Inattention to one's obligations or inability to meet one's obligations is a genuine ethical failure, a moral disgrace.

A teacher's job of instructing his or her students, for example, is never simply a professional responsibility: it is also a moral obligation. A cavalier attitude regarding this job, however poorly paid, would be unethical. And though dull students or ineffective administrators might bruise a teacher's devotion to duty, the ethical teacher persists in the exercise of reverence. Ethical students, similarly, exhibit reverence by committing themselves to learning from every teacher, including the irascible and the insipid.

Such devotion to social duties, however, could lead to a deleterious single-mindedness and servility.

Courage

Courage is self-sacrifice in the pursuit of goodness. Courage is only a virtue if the individual is also guided by righteousness (Huang 21). For example, it is courageous for employees to criticize their employer, thus risking their jobs, if their criticism is motivated by a genuinely unselfish desire to benefit the company. And it is courageous for the employer, risking his or her power and prestige, to consider such criticism with a receptive heart and mind. Similarly, it is courageous for business people to acknowledge a deficiency in their products or services, risking a loss of profit and reputation, to keep faith with their customers or clients. It is also courageous for customers or clients to accept lesser products or services, risking a loss of satisfaction, to support such candid and caring business people.

Courage is different, however, from simple audacity or daring. It is courageous to meet one's obligations to family and friends. It is daring to establish new relationships or to offer goodness out of proportion to the goodness received. Supporting the business proposal of a friend, for example, is courageous: supporting a stranger's is audacious. Foreigners who would like to do business with the Chinese, as a consequence, try to establish a relationship of reciprocal obligations (e.g., by

gift giving, by offering concessions) so that business emerges from the exercise of courage, from the Chinese meeting their obligations to their new foreign friends.

This definition of courage allows the Chinese to shield family and friends from dangerous foreigners and inhibits aggressive international exploits, but also has the potential to reinforce parochial and isolationist attitudes and policies.

Challenges to Confucian Thought

Classical Confucianism is challenged by the Taoist thought of the Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu schools. According to Lao Tzu, *tao* is the indefinable, inexhaustible, indeterminate, and dynamic void that is the source of all that is finite; *tao* is the unity of opposites, the change from negative to positive, from *yin* to *yang*, from tranquillity to action. To act deliberately is to make oneself an object of action and thus exhaust the potential for action. Remaining at the point of potential stimulates awareness of the *tao* and cultivates the *tao*. The ideal action is the action that arises spontaneously and naturally from that point of potential (Cheng 72-74). According to Chuang Tzu, however, *tao* is the relativity and relation of all things. Cultivating this understanding of the *tao* allows human beings to see the variety of possible perspectives from which life might be lived, thus leading to a natural and spontaneous life (Cheng 74-75). Both schools espouse a degree of passivity or resignation to existing social and political conditions. And Taoist thought encourages the isolation of the individual to achieve a contemplative union with the natural world, whereas Confucian thought requires individuals to immerse themselves within a society of reciprocal human relationships.

In the Buddhist philosophy of China, both the world and the mind have reality, both the ontological and the phenomenological, and "enlightenment is a dynamic unification of the objective with the subjective, that is, of the known object with the knowing subject" (Cheng 78). Each incident is the consequence of "innumerable causes interacting and interpenetrating each other" (Chang and Holt 33) and human life is thus essentially inexplicable because of the "inability to see all causative and conditioning factors" (Chang and Holt 34). While Confucians claim that virtues are innate and require only cultivation, Buddhists perceive a void: the mind is disciplined by meditation and studies and thus delivered from meaninglessness and suffering. Especially distressing for the Confucians is that Buddhism is a philosophy of foreign origin. In addition, it establishes the ideal of the monastic pursuit of truth—the individual who leaves his or her family, violating existing ethical obligations, to join a religious community separated from the wider society (Tillman 16-17).

Neo-Confucian philosophy incorporates Taoist and Buddhist influences, newly interpreting the classic writings of Confucius accord-

ing to a metaphysical principle: "a thing comes into existence and has its being through the interaction of the two material forces, *yin*, the cosmic force of tranquillity, and *yang*, the cosmic force of activity" (Chan xxi). All things are explained by this principle, including the relationship of cause and effect as well as of right and wrong (Chan xxi). The exercise of virtue serves to harmonize human life to this principle of existence. Nevertheless, Neo-Confucian philosophy preserves the traditional emphasis on the cultivation of virtues by individuals operating within concentric circles of human relationships.

Anti-Confucian philosophy, however, emerges during the 1800s as the Chinese come to question their poor economic and political conditions relative to the superior resources of the Europeans and Americans (who were dictating foreign policy to China, addicting its people to opium, and seizing its territory). New thinking espouses ideals of democracy as well as capitalist principles of business and denounces Confucian and Neo-Confucian philosophy as a chief contributor to political corruption and the decay of scientific learning and technological progress. With the collapse of the empire and the rise of the republic in the early 1900s, anti-Confucian thought has a major political impact on China. In the guidance of family, social, and business relationships, however, Confucian ideals continue to be the dominant philosophy.

The communists of the People's Republic of China initially emphasize the compatibility of Confucian philosophy and communism, chiefly as a way to give communism credibility and adapt traditional morality to socialist ethics (Kam 44-45). In the years of the radical communists, 1966 to 1976, however, Confucian thought is rejected as a competitor to Maoist principles (Kam 91). The teachings of Confucius on the virtue of wisdom, for example, privileging academic learning and putting the uneducated on the lowest level of society, are newly interpreted by Mao Zedong as oppressive of the lower classes (Kam 105-06). In a specific repudiation of Confucius, Mao denigrates scholars and teachers: "the lowly are the most intelligent, the elite are the most ignorant" (Kam 128). In the years following Mao, however, the effort to eradicate Confucian ideals comes to be widely recognized as futile.

In China today, Confucian thought again prevails, but often filtered by Taoist, Buddhist, Maoist, and especially anti-Confucian influences. The drive to modernize, liberalize, and democratize China is often synonymous with a rejection or revision of the Confucian traditions of Chinese society (Irwin 114-15).

Ethical Analysis of Intercultural Communication

As I mentioned earlier, Chinese philosophy is never speculative, but always a practical vehicle for solving real dilemmas. In that spirit, I investigate a relatively simple artifact of intercultural communica-

tion to determine the degree to which it is effective and ethical from the chiefly Confucian perspective of the target audience. Specifically, I analyze a breakfast cereal box created by Kellogg's® as it tries to introduce ready-to-eat cereal, specifically Coco Pops®, to the Chinese.

I acquired this artifact in 1994 during a visit to Hong Kong: it carries a 1989 copyright. I would like to display here the image of the box, but the nice people at Kellogg's® denied my permissions request.

I will readily admit that I don't know the full origins of this cereal package. I do know it was manufactured in Australia for distribution to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, all locations of chiefly Chinese populations. I don't know the people who designed the box, their professional experience, level of education, philosophical orientation, ethical intentions, language abilities, or racial heritage. And neither would the people buying this box of cereal. Such information regarding authorship is immaterial to the impact of the box on the reading public.

In addition, though I offer my reading of this box from a Confucian perspective, I can't promise that it is the only reading possible from a Confucian perspective or from a Chinese perspective. It is, however, according to my studies of the people and their philosophical literature, a credible reading.

While displaying both English and Chinese writing, the box is clearly addressed to a Chinese audience unfamiliar with ready-to-eat cereal. A traditional Chinese breakfast might be noodles or rice; ready-to-eat cereal is decidedly foreign. So the technical communicator has to offer both persuasive and instructional information—persuasive to convince people that eating ready-to-eat cereal is a desirable thing to do, and instructive to explain to people how to eat it. To accomplish this objective, the Kellogg's® cereal package conveys two different messages: the first reinforces Chinese traditions, emphasizing how Kellogg's® Coco Pops® accords with conventional foods and cultural practices, and the second challenges those traditions to create a space for the admission of a foreign product and its accompanying cultural practices. Both rhetorical strategies raise important ethical questions.

Persuasion

The right side of the cereal box displays two persuasive messages. One emphasizes tradition: "Kellogg's Coco Pops is a crisp nutritious breakfast cereal food that retains the delicious flavour of rice." This message emphasizes the similarity of the new food to the tradition of Chinese food: eating this cereal is really like eating rice. The specific wording, however, is a potential mistake: if the individual decides that Coco Pops® tastes less like rice and more like cocoa and sugar, Kellogg's® credibility could be jeopardized. Kellogg's® could be perceived as violating the virtue of faithfulness or trustworthiness.

The desired link to tradition could as easily be achieved with a definitive claim such as "Kellogg's Coco Pops is a crisp and nutritious rice cereal."

The other message emphasizes tradition, but also faithfulness, thus reinforcing the credibility of the earlier claim:

> The trustworthy sign of quality which is famous around the world.
>
> This red trademark of Kellogg's has a long history and is well-known by all families. It was originally the autograph of the founder of the Kellogg Company, W. K. Kellogg. It has been a guarantee of quality of each Kellogg's product since 1906. Now, it has become synonymous with "Good taste & nutrition" in breakfast cereals in over 130 countries throughout the world.
>
> If you are not satisfied with the quality of this product, please return the entire package with your name, address, reasons, where purchased, date and price paid. Our company will mail you another package as compensation.

The "red trademark" (i.e., the Kellogg's signature is always displayed in red) is mentioned because red in China is the color of good luck: according to Chinese rituals, red brings prosperity. The trustworthiness of the Kellogg's® family is also emphasized by citing the trademark's long history and its worldwide recognition by "all families" as a symbol of quality. The promise of quality and compensation for dissatisfaction proves the reverence or seriousness of the company in meeting its obligations.

The implication on this side of the box is clear: eating this cereal is a good thing to do because it accords with Chinese tradition, brings good luck, and comes from a sincere and credible company.

Instruction

On the opposite side of the box are verbal and visual instructions on how to serve ready-to-eat cereal: four small numbered pictures followed by four corresponding instructions. The first picture shows cereal being poured into a clear glass bowl (as opposed to the traditional ceramic bowl): the corresponding instruction is "Put 40g of nutritious Kellogg's Coco Pops into a clean bowl." A "clean bowl" is specified because of the Chinese practice of eating different foods in succession from the same bowl during a meal with several courses. This instruction thus poses a challenge to existing Chinese tradition. Similarly, each individual is instructed to create his or her own small bowl of cereal, as opposed to the Chinese practice of preparing a large common bowl of food from which individuals serve themselves into their smaller bowls. The designation of a specific quantity of cereal gives this instruction almost empirical precision, which coupled with the word "nutritious" and the repetition of "Kellogg's Coco Pops" has obvious persuasive implications: this ready-to-eat cereal, however new or different, is good food.

The second picture shows milk being added to the cereal, and the corresponding instruction is "Pour milk (fresh, longlife, powdered or soy)." Given that 80 to 90 percent of Chinese people are lactase-deficient and thus lactose-intolerant, their consumption of animal milk with this cereal could lead to abdominal pain, diarrhea, and malnutrition. In a culture that privileges the right to life-sustaining food, the omission of cautionary information on the package could be perceived as unethical—a failure of reverence and courage. While a detailed (and unappetizing) explication of the hazards of animal milk consumption might prove displeasing, a simple and discreet advisory is possible: "For better digestion, soy milk is recommended."

The third picture simply shows the cereal and milk sitting in the bowl with the non-instruction "Ready to serve." Because no action is specified here, either visually or verbally, a technical communicator would ordinarily omit this information (i.e., ready-to-serve cereal is really only a three-step process), but it does serve to emphasize the readiness of the cereal once the milk is added. The simplicity of preparation thus challenges the ritual complexity of Chinese cooking (i.e., the characteristic cutting and chopping, boiling and frying).

The fourth picture shows a silver spoon filled with cereal and positioned over the glass bowl. The corresponding instruction is "Eat and enjoy Kellogg's® Coco Pops®." The use of a silver spoon in the picture (instead of a traditional ceramic spoon) once again challenges existing Chinese practices. And the repetition of the name of the cereal reinforces the source of that challenge.

The instructions on this side of the box thus push aside Chinese traditions to create a space in Chinese culture for this foreign food. In doing so, the instructions could be perceived as violating righteousness by putting the pursuit of profits over the practice of ethical behavior. The failure to offer a caution regarding animal milk, in particular, could be perceived as evidence of insincerity or cowardice, a casual attitude or timidity about meeting one's ethical obligations, and ignorance of or indifference to the people buying one's product.

Education

While the sides of the box address adult audiences, the back of the box tries to engage Chinese boys and girls, offering both persuasive and instructional information through the "Kellogg's Nutrition Classroom." This information, offering a simplified explanation of nutrition, adds to the credibility of Kellogg's® and Kellogg's® Coco Pops® by its explicit invocation of the virtue of wisdom and the principle of formal education. The "classroom" metaphor here is especially significant because the traditional Chinese classroom is a highly authoritarian environment in which teachers are never challenged or questioned. In the nutrition classroom, the lesson is taught by a cartoon character, a bright-eyed smiling monkey, who also appears on the front of the box eating Kellogg's® Coco Pops® from a

silver spoon. This Kellogg's® Coco Pops® monkey thus aspires to a level of credibility similar to that characteristic of teachers. And Kellogg's® Coco Pops® aspires to be both academically and physically nourishing: food for the mind and the body.

The lesson starts with the following advice: "There are many different kinds of nutrition, and you can find all in many different kinds of food. So be sure to eat a balanced diet. Now, let me introduce my nutrition friends."

In a series of eight captioned drawings of cartoon characters, the Kellogg's® Coco Pops® monkey proceeds to introduce

- Mr. Protein, who "does important work making muscles, bones, and blood" and "helps you when you get sick"
- Mr. Carbohydrate, who "turns into calories, power, and energy" inside your body
- Ms. Fat, who "works making energy"
- Mr. Vitamin A, who will "help you grow" and is "good for your eyes"
- the Vitamin B family, who "help you get energy from your food and improve your appetite" as well as "help make strong bones and teeth"
- Ms. Vitamin C, who will "make the walls of your arteries and veins strong" and "make your teeth and gums healthy" as well as "help you get well" from cuts or burns
- Vitamin D, who will "help you get strong bones and teeth"
- Mr. Mineral (Iron), who "carries oxygen throughout your body and makes your blood thick."

The Kellogg's® Coco Pops® monkey also lists the various foods in which the nutrition friends "live," including Kellogg's® Coco Pops®. For example, he teaches that Mr. Protein "lives in meat, fish, milk, and beans" while Mr. Carbohydrate is located "in bread, Coco Pops, rice, and sweet things." (Milk—clearly necessary to Kellogg's® Coco Pops®—is promoted as housing three of the nutrition friends, including Vitamin D. In truth, however, Vitamin D is readily available from simple sunlight: it occurs in milk as a chemical additive.)

By personifying the constituents of nutrition, the Kellogg's® Coco Pops® monkey establishes a series of social relationships for the young audience. Through the "classroom" experience, each boy and girl comes to know his or her nutrition friends and appreciate their important service in sustaining life. Each boy and girl thus discovers a moral obligation to the friends as well as to the teacher, the Kellogg's® Coco Pops® monkey. And how is this moral obligation satisfied? The teacher's lesson concludes with the following advice:

> Now you see why it's important to get many kinds of nutrition. Did you know that the Kellogg's Coco Pops you like so much contain a good balance of vitamins, iron, protein and other nutrition? Have delicious Kellogg's at breakfast every morning, and you'll get energy to start the busy day.

The Chinese traditions of privileging education and establishing reciprocal obligations are elicited here to build allegiance to a foreign food and foreign eating practices.

The Lens of Ethics

Viewed through a Confucian lens, this cereal package addresses issues of goodness, righteousness, wisdom, faithfulness, reverence, and courage. Buying and using this foreign product thus constitutes for the target audience a moral decision. This cultural artifact has ethical implications that a technical communicator might be oblivious to unless he or she is familiar with the dominant beliefs and practices of China. A technical manual, research report, or business proposal is likely to be at least as ethically treacherous as this relatively simple package.

The lens of ethics thus offers a vital perspective for technical communicators. If intercultural technical communication is to be ethical as well as effective, teachers and researchers of technical communication ought to fortify their sweeping surveys of intercultural technical communication and analyses of illustrative case studies through focused research on the morality or moralities driving the communication practices of specific civilizations.

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