

Chapter 5

Culture Shock in Intercultural Communication

跨文化交际中的文化休克

You step into a new cultural world. Everything around you is new. You begin to adapt. But, this process takes time.

休克本来是指人体重要功能的丧失，如身体失血过多、呼吸循环功能衰竭等。而文化休克则是 1958 年美国人类学家 Kalvero Oberg 提出来的一个概念，是指一个人进入到不熟悉的文化当中时，感受到的一种迷失、疑惑、排斥甚至恐惧的感觉。一个长期适应于本国文化的人去到另一种新的文化环境中时，常常会在一段时间内出现这种文化休克现象。从文化学的角度来说，文化休克产生的根源还是在于原有文化模式的根深蒂固。当一个人面对新的文化形态时，如果他仍以原有文化作为认识和评判现有一切现象与行为的标准，就必定会产生文化休克现象。每年因为“文化休克”而不得不中止国外工作或学习任务而回国的例子很多。一位美国商人在中国逗留期间受到一位中国同行热情周到的照顾。回国时向中国同行保证：“等到了美国，就来我家，管吃管住。”不久这位中国人经历了十几个小时的长途旅行来到美国看望这位美国人。可是，这位美国朋友给他的接风招待只是一盘烤鸡块和一杯橘汁。这位远道而来的中国人无论如何没有想到，美国人如此实在，不讲客套。美国人在北京时，他可是在全聚德给他接的风。这位中国商人在美国人家中作客两天，第二天，美国朋友不太高兴地对他说：“我的儿子跟我抱怨，说你在楼上走路声音太大，洗澡水用得太多。希望你能走路轻点，洗澡快点。”简单的“接风”和如此的“谈话”着实让这位中国人在文化上“休克”了。针对文化休克现象，本章主要从以下几个方面进行论述：文化休克的五个阶段、文化休克症状、减轻文化休克的办法及高语境与低语境。通过本章的学习，你将会认识到：文化休克不可避免，但可以“预防”，可以“医治”。

1. Feelings of Culture Shock

文化休克的感觉

The term, culture shock, was introduced to describe the anxiety produced when a person moves to a completely new environment, especially when a person arrives in a new country where he is confronted with a new cultural environment. This term expresses the lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate.

The feeling of culture shock generally sets in after the first few weeks of coming to a new place. People suffer a lot at the very beginning, as they usually go through the following.

Familiar signs and symbols are lost. Generally speaking, culture shock is *precipitated* by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs are the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. When people are at home in their own country, they suffer little from these social activities. However, when they are away in a foreign country, they are always at a loss for what to do and how to do it.

precipitate v.
促进

Familiar cues are removed. When an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of the familiar cues are removed. He is like a fish out of water. No matter how broad-minded or good-willed he may be, a series of props have been knocked from him. This is followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety. First they reject the environment which causes the discomfort: The ways of the host country are bad because they make us feel bad.

All cultures are not exactly the same. As most people take for granted that all cultures operate and behave probably in exactly the same manner as their own, they are “shocked” or made temporarily uncomfortable by the differences and unpredictability they encounter, whether it be in the language, food or various social situations of everyday life. One positive aspect of the experience of living abroad

is the ability to better understand one's own culture and society through observing other's.

While American culture may be more straightforward in manner and rules of behavior, Asian cultures are more ambiguous, or relate more to individual situations and cannot be easily understood by or explained to those born outside their culture. For example, in Chinese culture a lot goes unsaid but is still completely understood by most, while to the foreigner, this can leave them at a complete loss. It is important to remember that no matter what the differences are, we all have the same needs and desires even if we communicate them differently.

For the sake of entering the market in China, an American business delegation arrived in China to sign a big contract with a Chinese company. The latter was so warm that they prepared an expensive welcome dinner for the delegation. The American delegation was shocked at what was served on the table: nice dishes of every kind, delicacies from land and sea. It was a banquet rather than a dinner. The delegation left for their own country the following day without signing any contract, for they thought such a company would not manage a business efficiently.

Both the American businesspeople and Chinese businesspeople suffer from culture shock in the case above, as the business communication came to an end because of the welcome dinner offered by the Chinese. Actually neither the Chinese nor Americans were wrong from the point of view of their own cultures. To the Chinese, they thought they did nothing wrong. They had to perform the duties of the host, as being warm and hospitable is a virtue which is valued by Chinese people in their traditional culture. To the Americans, they thought such a group of people would not run a business efficiently, as people are expected to focus more on business than on overelaborate formalities in their traditional culture.

From the case above, we can say for sure that it is a must for companies, especially the management staff, to have a good understanding of the foreign culture in order to avoid culture shock and make good profits in their businesses with foreign companies.

2. Stages of Culture Shock 文化休克阶段

Culture shock is frequently described as a series of stages that a person goes through. People will experience these stages when they are in a new country which enjoys a different culture from their own. In the beginning people are usually excited about what they will experience in the new environment; soon they feel disappointed by what they actually experience; later on they try to understand what is going on around them and feel happy; then they begin to adjust themselves to the new environment and enjoy their new life; and finally they feel comfortable in the new environment, as comfortable as in their old culture. Their feelings change as they experience different stages.

2.1 The Honeymoon Stage 蜜月阶段

The first stage is the *incubation* stage. This stage is also called the “honeymoon” stage, as everything encountered is new and exciting. In this stage, the new arrivals may feel *euphoric* and may be pleased by all of the new things encountered. Those who have just come to a foreign country are fascinated with everything that is new. They are embarking on a long sought-after adventure. People in this stage will demonstrate an eagerness to please people around, a spirit of cooperation, and an active interest in listening to people speaking. The excitement of life in a new culture seems to be endless.

<i>incubation</i> <i>n.</i> 潜伏
<i>euphoric</i> <i>a.</i> 心情愉快的

In reality, the new arrivals are delightful to get along with, but due to their enthusiasm to please, they frequently nod or smile to indicate understanding when in fact they don't understand at all. When misunderstandings mount up, they are likely to experience the second stage of cultural adjustment.

2.2 The Hostility Stage 敌意阶段

Afterward, the second stage presents itself. A person may encounter some difficult times and crises in daily life. For example, communication difficulties may occur such as not being understood.

In general, this stage is characterized by frustration, anger, anxiety, and sometimes depression. The initial excitement is taken place by frustration with the daily **bureaucracy** and the weariness of speaking and listening to another language every day. The new arrivals will be at a difficult, painful stage. They can be difficult to work with. They will try everyone's patience, and quite possibly give up, if they do not share their feelings with someone and realizes what is happening to them.

bureaucracy *n.*
繁文缛节

A Chinese manager was sent to work in the United States for one year, but he returned home in three months, as he couldn't bear what he encountered in the country. He couldn't enjoy the native food, the TV programs, or the ways of communicating with the native people. He was even sometimes misunderstood by the native people because of his behaviors and poor English.

2.3 The Recovery Stage 恢复阶段

The third stage is characterized by gaining some understanding of the new culture. A new feeling of pleasure and sense of humor may be experienced. One may start to feel a certain psychological balance. The new arrivals may not feel as lost as before and start to have a feeling of direction. They are more familiar with the environment and want to identify themselves with it. This initiates an evaluation of the old ways versus new ones.

At this stage, the new arrivals start feeling more positive, and they try to develop comprehension of everything they do not understand. The whole situation starts to become more favorable: They recover from the symptoms of the former stage, and adjust themselves to the new norms, values, and beliefs and traditions of the new country. They begin to see that even though the new culture is different from their own, it has elements that they can learn to appreciate.

This more relaxed state of being is accomplished by making some friends, being able to manage the size and complexity of the environment and understanding what is going on. They become generally easy to get along with because they are relaxed and receptive.

2.4 The Adjustment Stage 适应阶段

At the fourth stage, people realize that the new culture has good and bad things to offer. This stage can be one of double integration or triple integration depending on the number of cultures that people have to process. This integration is accompanied by a more solid feeling of belonging. People start to define themselves and establish goals for living.

At this stage, people have reached a point where they actually feel good because they have learned enough to understand the new culture. The things that initially made them feel uncomfortable or strange are now things that they understand. This acquisition of understanding *alleviates* much of the stress.

When people not only retain *allegiance* to their home culture, but also “feel at ease” with what they meet and where they are, they have successfully adjusted to the new culture, and should feel proud of themselves for achieving the ability to live successfully in two cultures.

<i>alleviate</i> v. 减轻 <i>allegiance</i> n. 忠诚, 忠贞

2.5 The Biculturality Stage 双重文化阶段

At this stage people have become comfortable in both the old and the new culture. They achieve biculturality to some extent. Biculturality is viewed by some as the healthy and even ideal stage of adaptation in which one's original cultural world view remains intact as alternative cultural frames are acquired. Though there is some controversy about whether it is within people's reach to be really “bicultural.”

The above stages take place at different times and each person has his own way of reacting in the different stages of culture shock. Many factors contribute to the duration and effects of culture shock. For example, the individual's state of mental health, type of personality, previous experiences, socioeconomic conditions, familiarity with the language, family and social support systems, and level of education. As a consequence, some stages will be longer and more difficult to deal with than others.

3. Symptoms of Culture Shock

文化休克的症状

There are many kinds of symptoms of culture shock. They may include: excessive concern over cleanliness of drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding; fear of physical contact with others; feeling of helplessness and desire for dependence on long-term residents of one's own nationality; irritation over delays and other minor frustrations; delay and *outright* refusal to learn the language of the host country; excessive fear of being cheated, robbed, or injured; great concern over minor pains and illnesses; and finally, that terrible longing to be back home, to be in familiar surroundings, to visit one's relatives, and, in general, to talk to people who really "make sense." Individuals differ greatly in the degree in which culture shock affects them. Although not common, there are individuals who cannot live in foreign countries. On the other hand, there are those who have gone through a serious case of culture shock and make satisfactory adjustments.

outright a.
全部的, 彻底的

3.1 Two Aspects of Culture Shock

文化休克的两个方面

We can divide the symptoms of culture shock mentioned above into two aspects: physical and psychological.

Physical symptoms of culture shock. Some of the physical symptoms of culture shock include: too much sleep or too little sleep, eating too much or having no appetite, frequent minor illnesses, upset stomachaches or headaches, and a general feeling of uneasiness.

A Chinese businessman was sent to work in the United States for a special project for one week. He suffered a lot for what he would eat every day. Sometimes he just went hungry, as he didn't have any appetite for Western food. When it was time for meals, he was busy looking for Chinese food. One week later, he returned home exhausted and dispirited. When asked what he had missed most about home, he said, "Chinese food."

Psychological symptoms of culture shock. Some of the psychological symptoms of culture shock include: loneliness or boredom, homesickness, idealizing home, feeling helpless and dependent, irritability and even hostility, social withdrawal, excessive concern for health or security, rebellion against rules and authority, feeling like you have no control over your life, feeling unimportant and being a foreigner, crying, negative stereotyping of people in the host country.

3.2 Symptoms of Culture Shock in a New Place 身处陌生地的文化休克症状

As we can see, many of these symptoms are not unusual. This is why it can be difficult to recognize when you have culture shock. Not everyone will experience all of these symptoms, and each person's reaction may be different. Let's study the following case and see how Professor Wang suffered from the symptoms of culture shock during his few days at a conference in the United States.

Wang, a Chinese professor of medical science, went to Seattle to present a paper at an academic conference. He arrived expectant and happy and enjoyed his first days very much. At the conference, he felt quite confident in his area of research and was able to perform well in his presentation. But after a few days, he began to feel uncomfortable. He spoke very good English on medical science, but he had very different social interaction skills from the local people, and he was unsure of the cues and the communication style. He worried more and more that he began misunderstanding simple English greetings and table conversation conventions. When someone greeted him with, "Hi, how's it going?" he thought they had asked him "where are you going?" and answered with the name of the conference hall, only to get a *quizzical* stare from them. At a Western style dinner, a colleague asked, "So how're you enjoyin' the States?" he thought he heard, "How are you enjoying your steak?" and answered that he was eating chicken, not beef. They smiled, and patiently repeated the question, and then both laughed at the error.

quizzical a.
困惑的

Such misunderstandings and miscommunications were minor. But for Professor Wang, they were the beginning of a sense of "cultural confusion." By the end of the conference, he felt a deep sense of "cultural stress" and was worn out from having to

pay attention to so many new expressions and ways of dealing with things. He felt his handshake was not as firm as Americans', found that people reacted unusually when he modestly insisted his English was not good after they complimented him, that he didn't know how to accept dinner invitations properly and therefore missed out on several lunches, and so on. Eventually, he was so bewildered that he felt the full impact of "culture shock."

3.3 Symptoms of Reverse Culture Shock 逆向文化休克症状

It is also natural that some people suffer from culture shock even when they are in their own country. Coming home after spending some time abroad is not an easy task. A similar adjustment period and its accompanying symptoms usually occur when a *sojourner* returns home. This is often called reverse culture shock. It takes people by surprise when they don't realize that it is normal. After all, it's somewhat ironic. The sojourner has been longing to return to the old, familiar culture of home. But once home, the returnees find many things to complain or criticize and often ask why the old culture can't be more like the one they recently encountered. Friends and family members often find the returnees impatient with things that never used to cause complaint. Returnees' most common complaint is that nobody wants to hear about the wonderful new experiences they have had.

sojourner <i>n.</i> 旅居者 mentor <i>n.</i> 指导者

Returnees find that people at home also have had new experiences to which they must adjust. For example, things have changed at the company where they work; people have been promoted, achieved success, retired, left for another employer, and so forth. They are something of an outsider after returning "home" and may have a new job to get used to as well as new contacts to make. They feel they have been laboring in foreign fields for the sake of the corporation, usually at some (nonmonetary) cost and personal sacrifice, but upon returning often they feel they are not valued. In response to it, some companies provide *mentors* and training programs to ease reentry.

Businesspeople who return after years abroad often feel they have a greater problem with reverse culture shock than they had when adjusting to the other culture.

It may be that an *inverse* relationship exists between ease of adjustment to an unfamiliar culture and degree of reverse culture shock: The easier it is to adjust to a new culture, the harder it is to readjust to home culture.

Let's see the following example and find out how Gerhard Baumgarten suffered reverse culture shock.

Gerhard Baumgarten, a German engineer, suffered from reverse culture shock when he returned home from the Middle East where he stayed for five years.

inverse *a.*
倒转的, 相反的
expatriate *n.*
移居国外者

"When coming home after a five-year stay in the Middle East I was really happy at first. Although I loved being there, I really missed home a lot. And then it seemed so great to have all the things back that I have missed for so long. But after a month things seemed to get worse. I was very miserable, got depressed and missed the Middle East. The people appeared strange, and even my family and friends, whom I have missed for so long, started to upset me."

This type of reaction is unfortunately not uncommon, many *expatriates* face such situation when returning home. After a short while of being enthusiastic about being home again, they feel increasingly isolated and frustrated with their home environment. What is happening, in fact, is a second culture shock.

As in the example the engineer is no longer really "German," and has become more "Middle Eastern." So coming home is similar to coming to another culture. While living abroad many people lose the perspective on their culture. What they miss tends to be an idealized home. Once they move back, they get confronted with the reality.

4. Curing Culture Shock 医治文化休克

Culture shock does not imply a serious mental condition, but rather a long-term psychological stress. Almost like a disease, it has a cause, symptoms, and a cure.

4.1 Defense Mechanisms Against Culture Shock 克制文化休克的防御机制

In reality, we have some mechanisms against culture shock. When we are trying

to adjust ourselves to a new culture, we devise some defense mechanisms to help us cope with the effects of culture shock.

Repression. The first coping mechanism is called “repression.” This happens when we pretend that everything is acceptable and that nothing bothers us.

repression <i>n.</i> 抑制, 压抑 regression <i>n.</i> 退回到较不成熟的 感情或行为方式

Regression. The second one is called “regression.” This occurs when we start to act as if we are younger than we actually are. We act like a child. We forget everything, and sometimes we become careless and irresponsible.

Isolation. The third kind of defense mechanism is called “isolation.” We would rather be home alone, and we don’t want to communicate with anybody. With isolation, we try to avoid the effects of culture shock. Isolation is one of the worst coping mechanisms we can use because it separates us from those things that could really help us.

Rejection. The last type of defense mechanism is called “rejection.” With this coping mechanism, we think we don’t need anybody. We feel we are coping fine alone, so we don’t try to ask for help.

As a matter of fact, the defense mechanisms we utilize are not helpful. If we only occasionally use one of these coping mechanisms to help ourselves survive, that is acceptable. We must be cautious, however. These mechanisms can really hurt us because they prevent us from making necessary adjustments to the new culture.

4.2 Alleviating Culture Shock 减缓文化休克

Generally speaking, culture shock can be alleviated, or minimized. Some multinational firms try to minimize culture shock by selecting employees for overseas assignments who possess certain personal and professional qualifications. In addition, it is advisable that the company conduct training programs for employees prior to overseas assignment.

Culture shock is an unfortunate side effect of going abroad, but people need to know that it will pass. If they have prepared themselves by learning about potential problems and differences, developing their language skills, and making a plan to get involved in the new community, they will be able to effectively deal with the

challenges of acculturation, alleviate or minimize culture shock. Actually, there are many ways for people to take for reducing cultural clashes. What follows are some suggestions for enhancing the international business experience by reducing clashes with the local culture.

Learning throughout your stay. You should understand that learning about the host culture is a process that continues throughout your stay in the host culture, and beyond. Far more learning will occur after your arrival in the host country. Make certain that you use a wide variety of information sources to learn about the host culture, including local people, newspapers, tourist information, libraries, and your own observation. Find a friend or colleague (either a local resident or an experienced expatriate) to serve as a guide and mentor to help you learn as quickly as possible.

vicinity *n.*
附近地区
configure *v.*
设计, 设置

Get involved. Soon after arrival, become familiar with your immediate physical surroundings. Armed with a good map of the *vicinity*, leave your hotel and walk in a number of different directions, exploring the city or town on foot. Identify local buildings, what they are used for, where they are in relation to one another, the pattern, if any, of how streets are *configured*, and where people seem to congregate. A familiarity with the “lay of the land,” will provide an excellent base for learning about other aspects of the culture.

Master simple tasks. Within the first several days of arrival, work on familiarizing yourself with some of the basic, everyday survival skills that your hosts take for granted. These include such capacities as using the local currency, using the public transportation system, buying stamps, using the telephone system, and ordering from a menu. By mastering these seemingly simple tasks, you will minimize frustrations and embarrassment quickly, as well as gain the self-confidence to master some of the more subtle aspects of the host culture.

Try to understand. As difficult as it may be, try to understand your hosts in terms of their culture rather than your own. When you encounter a behavior or an attitude that appears strange or even offensive, try to make sense of it in terms of their cultural assumptions rather than your own. This is not to suggest that you should adopt their attitudes or behaviors, or even like them, but you will better understand them when viewed from their proper cultural perspective.

Learn to live with ambiguity. Particularly in the beginning, learn to live with the ambiguity of not having all the answers. Trying to operate in a new culture is, to a great extent, a highly ambiguous situation. The person who insists on having immediate and *clear-cut* answers for everything is likely to be frustrated. It is important for the cultural *neophyte* to know that there will be many unanswered questions. By being patient and learning to live with ambiguity, the new arrivals will preserve their mental health and “buy time” to learn more answers, reduce the ambiguity, and thus eventually adjust to the new culture.

Be empathetic. As a way of enhancing your relationships with your hosts, make a conscious effort to be empathetic, i.e., put yourself in the others’ shoes. It is only natural for people to be attracted to those individuals who can see things from their point of view. Empathy can be practiced by becoming an active listener. First try to understand, and then try to be understood.

clear-cut a.
明确的、清楚地
neophyte n.
新手、初学者
empathetic a.
移情的
downright ad.
完全地、彻底地
disarmingly ad.
使人不紧张地
faux pas n.
失礼、失言
pathological a.
病态的

Be flexible and resourceful. Understand that flexibility and resourcefulness are key elements of adapting to a new culture. When living and working in a different culture, the best-laid plans often are not realized. When plans do not work out as expected, you need to make and execute new plans quickly and efficiently without becoming overstressed. Resourceful people are familiar with what is available in the host culture, are comfortable with calling on others for help, and know how to take advantage of available opportunities.

Be humorous. Don’t lose your sense of humor. People in any situation, either at home or abroad, tend to get themselves in trouble if they take themselves too seriously. When struggling to learn a new culture, everyone makes mistakes that may be discouraging, embarrassing, or *downright* laughable. In most situations, your hosts will *disarmingly* forgive your social *faux pas*. The ability to laugh at your own mistakes (or at least not lose sight of the humorous side) may be the ultimate defense against embarrassment.

To be certain, no bottled remedies for culture shock are to be found at the pharmacy. But, simply knowing that culture shock exists, that it happens to everyone to some extent, and that it is not permanent is likely to reduce the severity of the symptoms and speed the recovery. Don’t think you are *pathological* or inadequate

if you experience some culture shock. The anxiety resulting from trying to operate in a different environment is normal. Give yourself permission to feel frustration, homesickness, or irritability. Eventually, you will work through these symptoms and come up with a much richer appreciation of the host culture. But it is also important to remain realistic. There may be others who, for purely personal reasons, you will not like and *vice versa*. And there are some things that may never be understood. But once you understand that these problems are perfectly normal reactions for anyone in the same situation, you can begin to search for solutions.

vice versa *ad.*
反之亦然
extol *v.*
赞美

5. High-context and Low-context Cultures 高语境与低语境文化

The high-context culture and low-context culture are the terms that refer to “the fact that when people communicate, they take for granted how much the listener knows about the subject under discussion. In low-context communication, the listener knows very little and must be told practically everything. In high-context communication the listener is already ‘contexted’ and so does not need to be given much background information” (Hall, 1990).

Let’s look at the following case for a better understanding of how high-context culture and low-context culture work in our daily life. One day, an American businessman went to visit a Chinese family with one of his Chinese friends. In the living room, the American was much interested by the Chinese handicrafts on the shelves. He pointed to one of the handicrafts and *extolled* it particularly. The Chinese host immediately took the handicraft out of the shelf and gave it to the American and said, “Have it as a present from me.” the American was surprised. He refused to take it and said, “I didn’t mean it. It is a precious handicraft.” But the Chinese host did not stop offering until the American took it. He felt embarrassed with the handicraft in his hand. The next day, the American businessman explained to his Chinese friend: “I did not have any intention to have the handicraft. I complimented the host on the handicraft just because it is good. I meant nothing else at all.”

From this example, we can find that people of different cultural backgrounds

usually behave and respond in different ways in the same context. To be exact, people of high-context culture and low-context culture may sometimes suffer from culture shock in their intercultural communication. To the Chinese host, extolling the handicraft implies wanting it, as there is a saying in Chinese: When you listen to someone's talk, you must judge by his tone. The tone of the American's compliments told the Chinese host that the American liked the handicraft so much that he wanted to have it. To the American, his extolling the handicraft implies nothing but his personal comments on it or politeness. The result of their communication made both of them a little embarrassed.

Why are the people of different cultural backgrounds so different in such a context? Let's see more explanation given by Edward T. Hall, an American anthropologist. In his theory of high-context culture and low-context culture, Edward T. Hall believes that any cultural transaction can basically be divided into two communication systems: high-context and low-context. In high-context transmission of message, most of the information is in the physical world or in individuals; only minimal information is in the transmitted message (*explicated* code). By contrast, in low-context transmission of message, most of the information is in the transmitted message.

Based on these two kinds of different contexts, the cultures in this world can be classified into two major categories: high-context and low-context cultures. In high-context culture, the members usually have the same language of some race as well as the same norms of values, so information is easy to transmit; while in low-context culture, it is different because various differences exist in the society, resulting from the presence of many subcultures independent of each other.

Although no culture exists exclusively at either extreme, in general, low-context cultures refer to groups of cultures that value individual *orientation* and *overt* communication codes and maintains a *heterogeneous normative* structure with low cultural demand characteristics. Conversely, high-context cultures refer to groups of cultures that value group identity orientation and covert communication codes and maintains a *homogeneous* normative structure with high cultural demand characteristics. In general, Germany, Scandinavian countries and the U.S. are situated

<p>explicate v. 说明, 阐释 orientation n. 倾向性 overt a. 明显的, 公开的 heterogeneous a. 由不同成分组成的 normative a. 标准化的 homogeneous a. 同类的</p>
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at the low-context end of the *continuum*; Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures are located at the high-context end. It is obvious that philosophy can influence communication. Confucianism, for example, has permeated the culture of all the three Eastern Asian countries, and it influences the way people communicate.

continuum *n.*
连续体

In high-context culture of China, for example, a large portion of the message is left unspecified and need to be accessed through the context, nonverbal cues, between-the-lines interpretation of what is actually said or written, and which is reflected by frequent using of uncompleted sentences. In contrast, in North America, which is labeled as a low-context culture, messages are expected to be explicit and specific. More is spelt out than left for the receiver to deduce from the context.

American contracts are usually about ten times longer than French contracts. Americans like to have a lot of the context stated explicitly. The French don't care very much about the explanation, as much of the information is taken for granted.

In high-context cultures, what people mean is judged not only by their words but also by the context in which the message occurs. In such a context, "yes" can mean "yes" but probably means "no." But in low-context culture, people judge what others mean mainly by their words. In such a context, "yes" usually means "yes." Let's look back at the case given at the beginning. Culturally speaking, both the Chinese host and the American businessman are right in the context. Because of his high-context culture, the Chinese host judged what the American businessman said by the tone of his words, so he offered him the handicraft. Because of his low-context culture, the American meant only what he said and no more.

High-context cultures, in which the context of messages is well understood by both the sender and the receiver, use the context to communicate the message. Members of these cultures rely on context to help clarify and complete the message. Members of low-context cultures, however, put their thoughts into words. They tend to think that if thoughts are not solidified in words, they will not be understood correctly or completely.

A very distinguished 75-year-old Chinese scholar and statesman was being honored by a university in the eastern United States. He and his wife had just made the 21-hour flight from Beijing, and they were met at the airport by some friends who exclaimed, "You must be very tired!" His response was "*Keyi*," which means "it's possible" or "OK." Of course he was tired. He had sat on the airplane for 21 hours straight. The context—the meeting in an airport at night, the fact of his long journey, his age, his glazed eyes—communicated the obvious. It was unnecessary to put it into words.

Yet, it is not hard for a Westerner to suppose the situation in reverse. An American traveler to Beijing gets off the plane after 24 hours of continuous travel and in response to the same comment, "You must be tired!" replied, "Tired! I've never been so tired in my life. I've been sitting on planes or in waiting rooms for 24 hours and wondered if my legs would work again! My eyes are so *gritty* with sleep."

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The following two tables may help you better understand high-context culture and low-context culture.

Characteristics of High-context Culture

1. People almost enjoy the same norms or values.
2. Most of the information is in the physical world or in individuals.
3. People value group identity orientation and covert communication codes and maintains a homogeneous normative structure with high cultural demand characteristics.
4. A large portion of the message is left unspecified and need to be accessed through the context.
5. People judge what someone is talking about not only by what he is saying but also by the context in which the message occurs.

Characteristics of Low-context Culture

1. People enjoy different subcultures.
2. Most of the information is in the transmitted message.
3. People value individual orientation and overt communication codes and maintains a heterogeneous normative structure with low cultural demand characteristics.
4. Messages are expected to be explicit and specific.
5. People judge what someone is talking about mainly by what he is saying.

Summary

Culture Shock

1. Culture shock expresses the lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate.
2. Five stages of culture shock can be identified as: honeymoon stage, hostility stage, recovery stage, adjustment stage and biculturality stage.
3. The symptoms of culture shock include two aspects: physical and psychological.
4. People can suffer from the symptoms of culture shock in a new place and in their own country as well.
5. There are some mechanisms against culture shock, such as repression, regression, isolation and rejection. Culture shock can be alleviated, or minimized.

High-context Culture and Low-context Culture

1. Members of high-context cultures use the context to communicate the message, as both senders and receivers understand the context of the message well.
2. Members of low-context cultures put their thoughts into words. They tend to think that if thoughts are not solidified in words, they will not be understood correctly or completely.