

An Analysis of East-West Business Communication from the Perspective of Multicultural Dimension

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Abstract

With the development of technology and the deepening of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become an indispensable part of human social life. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, this paper uses case analysis to study the application of this theory in Eastern and Western business communication. Through in-depth theory and case analysis, it is found that cultural dimension has an important impact on cross-cultural business communication. Understanding and applying the cultural dimension facilitates effective business interactions and is critical to international competitiveness and strong partnerships. This paper analyzes the causes of cross-cultural conflicts and communicative frictions between Eastern and Western cultures through cases, and puts forward countermeasures to improve cultural conflicts in business communication. Enterprises or individuals can better understand each other's cultural background and behavior pattern by grasping the cultural dimension, so as to improve the efficiency and quality of communication and promote the harmonious development of business relations.

Keywords

Globalization, Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Dimension, Business Communication, Case Study

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the development of globalization, business communication between the East and the West has become increasingly frequent and farther. This kind of communication is not only the economic level of communication, but also the cultural

level of collision and integration. Cross-cultural communication has become one of the key factors for business success.

With the formation of the global market, enterprises have to carry out business activities across national borders in order to seek a broader market and resources. We can deeply feel that the progress of the Internet and communication technology has greatly reduced the cost of communication and made cross-cultural communication more convenient. It is worth noting that there are significant differences in cultural backgrounds, values and social customs among countries in the world, which are especially evident in business communication.

1.2. Research Significance

From the theoretical research, multicultural perspective can provide a new research method and perspective for cross-cultural communication theory. By comparing and analyzing the differences between Eastern and Western cultures in business communication, we can enrich and improve the existing theoretical framework of cross-cultural communication. Secondly, through in-depth study of Eastern and Western cultures from a multicultural perspective, this paper aims to reveal the deep mechanism and rules of business communication under different cultural backgrounds, hoping to provide a more detailed theoretical basis for the study of cross-cultural communication.

From the practical research point of view, it has the following significance. First, the integration of Eastern and Western economies has made cross-border business interactions more dynamic. Companies from different cultural backgrounds are increasingly collaborating and competing on a global scale. This requires an in-depth understanding of how cultural differences affect people's communication, negotiation, and decision-making processes. By examining business communication from a multicultural perspective, this paper hopes to develop effective ways to deal with cultural differences and contribute to the success of business communication. Secondly, there are challenges arising from cultural misunderstandings in the international business community. Traditional or nationalistic modes of communication often do not lead to effective cooperation. This paper hopes to mitigate this problem by exploring the factors that influence East-West business communication and mitigate the risks associated with cultural conflict in the business environment. In addition, by focusing on East-West business communication, companies or individuals can become more aware of the importance of respecting cultural diversity at work. This is in line with the contemporary society's call for social civilization and fairness, and advocates a harmonious, stable and win-win business environment.

1.3. Research Questions

This study will explore the following questions:

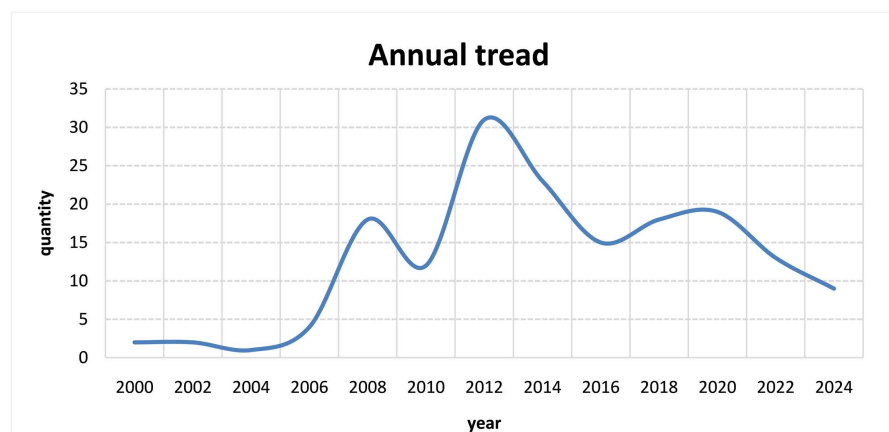
- 1) What are the key cultural differences in business practices between Eastern and Western enterprises?

2) How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions influence interactions and negotiations between businesses in these distinct cultural contexts?

3) What strategies can businesses and individuals adopt to effectively address cultural conflicts and improve communication efficiency in an increasingly interconnected global marketplace?

2. Literature Review

With the deepening of economic globalization, cross-cultural business communication has attracted extensive attention from academic circles at home and abroad in recent years. In CNKI China Journal full-text Database, with "cross-cultural business communication" as the subject term, and some duplicate literatures and unrelated literatures were screened and excluded. By December 2023, a total of 344 valid journal articles were obtained. It can be found that the number of annual papers published has increased significantly since 2006.



After reviewing the research literature on "cross-cultural business communication", it is found that scholars' research mainly involves the following aspects:

2.1. Studies Abroad

Foreign scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on the theoretical basis of cross-cultural business communication. The intercultural communication competence model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) emphasizes the importance of culture-specific communication competence, especially the use of strategies to avoid communication traps, simplify expression, and manage communication failures. In addition, Johnson et al. (2006) linked cross-cultural communication ability with "cultural intelligence", pointing out that mastering necessary skills and knowledge is not enough to ensure effective communication, and environmental and situational factors also significantly affect the application of cross-cultural communication, resulting in the gap between "knowing" and "doing". Nisbett (2003) put forward the theory of thinking differences between the East and the West in *The Geography of Thinking*, emphasizing the ways in which different cultural values directly affect business decision making and conflict resolution.

American anthropologist [Edward Hall \(1976\)](#) put forward the concept of high-low context Culture and elaborated it systematically in his book *Beyond Culture*. He believes that culture and context are two crucial factors in cross-cultural communication. [Charles \(2007\)](#) pointed out that in cross-cultural business communication, different cultural backgrounds interact and restrict each other, which ultimately affects the nature of communicative language. [Carte & Fox \(2008\)](#) pointed out that the challenge of international business lies in being able to predict, understand and adjust cultural differences in transnational business activities.

Foreign research also emphasizes the dynamic nature of cross-cultural business communication. [Jameson \(2007\)](#) pointed out that the effect of communication not only depends on the knowledge and skills of the participants, but also is influenced by the macro cultural environment and micro situational factors. The interaction of these factors shapes the concrete practice and outcome of communication. In this area, researchers suggest taking a broader view of the dynamics of communication and exploring how to deal more effectively with cultural conflict and integration in real business. [Varner \(2000\)](#) tried to establish a multi-dimensional and dynamic theoretical model of cross-cultural business communication. He believed that cross-cultural business communication is not a simple combination of culture, communication and business components, but a unique framework that integrates business, culture and communication into one, which is different from cross-cultural communication theories. The three interact with each other and have equal status.

2.2. Studies at Home

With the rapid development of the Chinese economy, domestic scholars are increasingly focusing on the theoretical construction and practical application of cross-cultural business communication. [Yan \(2009\)](#) posited that “cognitive ability, emotional ability, and behavioral ability” are the crucial building blocks of the cross-cultural business communication competence system, and it is these three components that structure the essential content of the system. [Shi and Xu \(2012\)](#) emphasized that current research should pay attention to the dynamic influencing factors in the communication environment and the mutual construction relationships among various factors. This exploration is seen as a new trend for future research.

Domestic studies have highlighted the impact of lacking cross-cultural communication competence. For example, [Huang \(2018\)](#) indicated that if business professionals fail to understand the cultural customs of the target country, the outcomes of communication may be significantly altered, or even result in communication failures. [Yang and Pan \(2018\)](#) pointed out in their studies that the resolution of cultural conflicts should be achieved through cultural integration and interaction with the host country’s culture, ultimately forming a cross-cultural management model that aligns with the enterprise’s development.

[Zhao \(2021\)](#) pointed out that cross-cultural business communication ability

involves many factors such as culture, business, communication and language. The function of cross-cultural business communication ability is the result of the comprehensive effect of these factors, and it also penetrates into personal emotion and personality ability, showing distinct personalized characteristics. Si (2021) pointed out that international business negotiation is the first and most critical step for enterprises to conduct transnational transactions. Compared with general business negotiations, international business negotiations contain more complex factors, involving not only the negotiating enterprises but also the negotiating countries, and the differences in politics, economy and culture between countries may cause disputes in international business negotiations.

2.3. Comments on Previous Studies

To sum up, the existing research provides a rich theoretical basis for understanding the cultural differences between Eastern and Western business communication, and provides a valuable perspective for us to analyze the Eastern and Western cultures, but there are also certain limitations. On the one hand, the research mainly focuses on the establishment of theoretical framework, and lacks the in-depth analysis of practical cases. Moreover, as the business environment continues to change, ways to effectively address and improve cross-cultural communication challenges remain underexplored.

Building upon these gaps, my research aims to take a deeper look at practical applications, focusing on how multinational companies survive in different cultural contexts. In addition, I intend to explore new forms and challenges of cross-cultural communication in the digital age to provide actionable insights and strategies for enhancing cross-cultural interaction in a rapidly changing global business environment.

3. Cultural Dimension Theory

3.1. Proposal and Development

The founder of the cultural dimension theory is the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede, who first proposed and systematized the theory in the 1970s. In his cross-cultural study of IBM employees, Hofstede identified several cultural dimensions that influence employee behavior and values. The four cultural dimensions originally proposed by Lonner et al. (1981) are: Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance.

As his research progressed, Hofstede later added two more dimensions: Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation and Indulgence vs. Restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Hofstede said “Culture is the common mental process of people in an environment, not of individual characteristics, but of many people with the same educational and life experience, which differs from one group, region or country to another.” His cultural dimension theory has a great influence in the world, and one of the important reasons is the extensive data collection. From 1967 to

1973, he conducted two surveys of IBM's cultural values in 40 countries and regions, with 116,000 people surveyed. Therefore, the relatively objective cultural value dimensions such as power distance and collectivism/individualism advocated by him are regarded as the standard for analyzing cultural characteristics by many scholars (Lu, 2023). The proposal of this theory has greatly promoted the development of cross-cultural studies and provided an important perspective for enterprises to understand and cope with cultural differences in the process of internationalization.

3.2. Application of Cultural Dimension Theory

Cultural dimension theory is widely used in different fields, such as enterprise management, classroom instruction, exhibition business, talent communication, product design and so on. It is widely used in the fields of cross-cultural management and international business. In the field of business, a good grasp of this theory can help enterprises understand the communication styles and customer needs under different cultural backgrounds, so as to formulate more effective communication and marketing strategies.

The theory also provides a data-based quantitative method to measure cultural differences. Hofstede translates cultural differences into measurable indicators by comparing and analyzing raw data from different countries and regions. This data-driven approach allows researchers and practitioners to more accurately assess and understand the extent of cultural differences and thus better develop cross-cultural management strategies and implementation programs (Xiao, 2023). Therefore, the cultural dimension theory brings advantages and convenience to researchers and staff.

Some scholars have also proposed that although the theory has been widely used in cross-cultural communication research at home and abroad, how to recognize and give full play to its true validity still needs to make joint efforts through theoretical localization and theoretical innovation (Wang, 2019). This requires us to maintain critical analysis and creative thinking in the face of the changing global landscape to ensure the rational application of theory.

4. Application of Cultural Dimension Theory in East-West Business Communication

This paper makes several case studies on the application of the main dimensions of cultural dimension theory in East-West business communication.

4.1. Power Distance

Power distance refers to the strength of a social hierarchy. It measures the degree to which people at a lower level accept the fact that social status or power is unevenly distributed in society. Here's a case:

Sarah, an American executive, travels to India for an important business negotiation with a local company. She had chosen a formal business suit to prepare for

the meeting, and when she arrived at the venue, Sarah noticed that the Indian executives she was meeting were seated in hierarchical order, with the senior members at the head of the table. During the presentation, senior executives speak first, outlining their expectations and the structure of the negotiations. In addition, Sarah found that there is a hierarchical communication style in the meeting process, and only discussions and decisions between senior managers get more attention and exposure in the meeting, while the voices of other members are relatively weak. It made her more aware of a culture in which the opinions of superiors are often the final word, while those of subordinates need to be vetted and communicated through layers. Sarah realized the need to show respect to the leadership, so she listened carefully and let the senior manager guide the conversation at the beginning. As the meeting went on, Sarah was invited to speak. When referring to them, she used formal titles, such as Mr. And Dr., and acknowledged their positions in the company. This shows her awareness of the power distance that exists in Indian business culture.

Sarah's experience illustrates the concept of power distance in a business context. Generally speaking, the power distance index under the influence of Eastern culture is higher, while the power distance index under the influence of Western culture is lower (He et al., 2022). In cultures with high power distance, such as India, hierarchical structures are deeply embedded in social and professional interactions. Individuals in lower positions are expected to show respect towards those in higher positions, and this is often reflected in communication styles, seating arrangements, and attire.

Visual cognition has become one of the important ways for us to obtain information. Visual imagery fills people's daily lives today and is the most common form of information that people read, consciously or inadvertently (Chen, 2022). By dressing formally and showing respect for hierarchy in meetings, Sarah intuitively acknowledges the cultural expectations associated with power distance. This alignment with local customs helps her establish credibility and rapport with her Indian counterparts. If Sarah had opted for casual attire and ignored the formalities, it could have been perceived as disrespectful, negatively impacting her ability to negotiate effectively.

This case emphasizes the significance of understanding power distance when engaging in international business. It can be seen that there are obvious differences in authority, decision-making power and discourse power between senior executives and lower-level employees. Recognizing and adapting to cultural norms related to hierarchy can foster better communication, minimize misunderstandings, and lead to more successful outcomes in cross-cultural negotiations. For international business people, it is essential to research and respect the cultural dynamics of their counterparts to cultivate positive relationships and enhance collaboration.

4.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism champions personal autonomy and the pursuit of individual goals,

often prioritizing self-reliance and personal success. Collectivism, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the group over the individual, advocating for collective goals and shared responsibilities.

Extended to business communication, in the collectivist society represented by China, Japan and other eastern countries, people are mainly stable and adaptable, smooth, low-key, reserved and reserved. They are good at using dialectical thinking to look at problems. People tend to think from a macro perspective, and pay more attention to communication with dynamic, connected and developing thinking. In the face of communication barriers, they will choose to seek a solution that takes care of the group (Chen, 2021). Here is a case:

John, an American sales manager, was sent to Japan in order to establish a business relationship with a potential Japanese customer. Immediately after arriving in Japan, he arranged a meeting with the head of the Japanese company's purchasing department. In the meeting, John directly presented his product advantages and sales plan, and expected the other party to make a quick purchase decision. However, the Japanese head was polite but reserved, saying that he needed more time to think about it and wanted John to meet with other heads of the company. John was confused because he was used to efficient communication and quick decision making in the United States. He began to realize that he might need to adjust his communication style. Over the next few weeks, John attended a number of meetings and talked with different heads of the Japanese company, and finally the two sides reached a friendly cooperation.

John's original approach was rooted in the individualistic culture to which he was accustomed, prioritizing direct communication and quick decision making. However, he soon ran into cultural barriers in Japan. Japan is known for its collectivist values, where harmony within teams and the cultivation of long-term relationships are crucial. This collectivist culture emphasizes the collective good and stability of relationships, which is in stark contrast to the individual-centered approach to which John is accustomed. Recognizing the need for change, John began to observe and learn from the Japanese way of doing business. He realized that patience and a focus on consensus-building were essential elements of Japanese business culture. Over the next few weeks, John attended many meetings and had extensive discussions with various department heads in the Japanese company. He learned to temper his directness by understanding in more detail the importance of group dynamics and the gradual process of decision-making. John's adjustment is not just a superficial change in communication style, but a deeper understanding of the values and processes that underpin Japanese business practices. He took time to understand the value of the views and concerns of all of the company's stakeholders, rather than pushing for quick solutions based on his own agenda. This shift in approach allowed him to engage more effectively with his Japanese counterparts and build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. Ultimately, John's ability to flexibly understand and adapt to Japanese culture played a crucial role in building strong business relationships. This

experience highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in cross-cultural business communication. By embracing these principles, John is able to bridge the cultural gap and achieve his business goals in a way that respects and aligns with the values of his Japanese partners. This case provides a valuable lesson in the importance of open learning and adapting to different cultural backgrounds in the pursuit of successful international business relationships.

4.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity is often driven by competition, confidence, and the pursuit of success, valuing material achievement. Femininity prioritizes cooperation, quality of life, and nurturing relationships, with a focus on social welfare and equality. Masculinity cultures such as those in Japan and Germany, which emphasize performance and competition, shape a more confident business environment. In femininity cultures such as Sweden and Norway, the focus on maintaining a balanced lifestyle and ensuring social equity has shaped a more collaborative and supportive corporate culture. This is a case of Finnish culture:

When a Chinese technician asked a Finnish expert about the experience and methods of the other side's areas of expertise, the other side readily accepted. Experts take the initiative to share experience, answer ideas, and patiently reply to the questions of Chinese technicians in a timely manner. Also, a Chinese staff member needs to communicate with the global R&D team in a timely manner, and often works at night due to jet lag and is accustomed to it. He quickly replied to the emails of his cross-level Finnish boss several times, and the Finnish boss directly replied: "It's too late, you should rest, and continue tomorrow." This makes the staff feel the Finnish people's concern for humanity and the culture of valuing life. When a Chinese technician asked a Finnish expert about the experience and methods of the other side's areas of expertise, the other side readily accepted. Experts take the initiative to share experience, answer ideas, and patiently reply to the questions of Chinese technicians in a timely manner (Zhong, 2023).

Finnish experts patiently respond to the questions of Chinese technicians and provide timely assistance, reflecting the sensitivity and responsiveness to others' needs inherent in the feminine culture. In such a culture, patience and prompt help are considered the foundation for building good interpersonal relationships and teamwork. The willingness to share one's own experiences and methods reflects the emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing characteristic of the feminine culture. The Finnish boss reminding the Chinese employee to rest late at night demonstrates concern for the employee's well-being. In the feminine culture, people place greater importance on interpersonal relationships and social support, believing that work and personal life should be balanced, and caring for others' health and happiness is a significant social value.

The social culture of feminine countries like Finland places more value on work-life balance and quality, favors incentives such as free time and flexibility, and treats ordinary people and the weak well. Such behavior is also recognized by

the society. The pursuit of success, dominance, or elevating oneself above others is not consistent with the values of these countries.

For professionals working across cultures, recognizing the value systems that underpin different cultural behaviors can lead to more harmonious and productive interactions. By adapting to and appreciating these differences, individuals can foster stronger cross-cultural relationships and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive global business environment.

4.4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to people's tolerance for feeling threatened by ambiguous or uncertain factors. There are various unpredictable situations in the society, which are full of uncertainty. However, social members may have different reactions and attitudes in the face of uncertain situations. In other words, uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which people can tolerate the uncertainty and possible risks they face (Wang, 2022). In business, Japan, Malaysia, Greece, Portugal and other countries with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance have a high degree of avoidance of unknown factors, so they usually plan ahead and are used to doing things according to rules. Here is the case:

An American technology company held several meetings with a Japanese electronics manufacturing company about working together to advance a new technology. Early in the meeting, the US team presented a highly innovative technical solution that was planned to take a rapid iterative approach to development and testing. However, the Japanese team did not fully agree with this and put forward requirements, hoping to set up more detailed risk assessment steps in the project plan, and hope to set more fixed time nodes in the development process to control the process. After much discussion, the two sides finally decided to adopt a hybrid approach for the project. The US team continued to implement a flexible and fast development model, while incorporating the regular assessment and risk management process proposed by the Japanese team. This compromise effectively combines the strengths of the two cultures, improving the chances of the project's success while reducing potential risks.

The U.S. plan was too risky in the eyes of the Japanese partners, who believed that rapid changes could lead to increased uncertainty, and therefore wanted to allow enough time in the cooperation plan to conduct thorough testing and forecasting. According to the research conclusion of Hofstede et al. (2010), Japan is a country with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. It adopts the "total quality management" approach in enterprise organization and management, and controls the quality process through strict systems and norms. For this reason, Japan is a rigorous and efficient nation. The America, on the other hand, has a low degree of uncertainty avoidance, no systematic rules and regulations have been formed in enterprise management, and the instructions of superiors tend to float in form, with relatively free behavior and operation.

This case clearly reflects the difference of uncertainty avoidance. The low

uncertainty avoidance tendency in American culture makes them more open and innovative in decision-making, while the high uncertainty avoidance tendency in Japan encourages them to reduce risks and uncertainties through structured processes. This difference affects the cooperation mode and decision-making process of the two teams in the actual business communication. If the two sides can communicate patiently and arrange scientifically, this difference can be mitigated.

4.5. Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation

In a society with a long-term oriented culture, people value tradition and are forward-looking, and this culture is closely linked to the rapid economic development of the country. Asian countries such as China, Singapore and South Korea, for example, all view the world from a dynamic perspective and focus on planning for the future. In the business communication of enterprises, this long-term oriented culture affects the employees' concept of time. Instead of getting down to business right away, they tend to take the time to get to know each other's background and discuss substantive issues only after building and deepening the relationship. This type of communication is often predictive and does not speak too bluntly, but leaves room for future cooperation and development.

On the contrary, members of society with a short-term oriented culture are more inclined to focus on immediate benefits, with relatively little planning and consideration for the future. Many western countries are affected by this culture. Enterprises tend to pursue the maximization of short-term interests, and employees and managers may have different goals and lack of sharing of common interests. In this cultural context, people's communication characteristics are to give priority to discussing topics related to their direct interests, and only on the premise of ensuring their personal interests will they appropriately expand interpersonal relationships and avoid wasting time on unimportant communication purposes. Here is the case:

In 2016, China's Haier Group announced a \$5.4 billion deal to buy General Electric's (GE) home appliance business. They are not only focused on short-term financial returns, but also on improving their technology level and international market position by acquiring GE's home appliance business. Haier's top management team considered long-term brand building, technology integration and global market expansion in their decision-making process. In contrast, GE decided to sell this business unit to focus on its core businesses, such as aviation, energy and healthcare, in order to achieve financial optimization in the short term.

Haier Group has shown a long-term oriented culture in the acquisition process. Its long-term oriented decisions have helped it build a stronger brand in international markets and gain access to GE's technology and global sales network. This long-term perspective helps Haier remain competitive in the global home appliance market and lays the foundation for future growth. By contrast, GE's sale of its appliance business reflects a more short-term oriented culture. GE decided to

sell the unit because declining margins in the appliance business no longer fit with the company's long-term strategy of pursuing high-margin businesses, and it has shifted its focus to maximizing profits in its core business. However, this strategy may also limit GE's long-term potential and market share in appliances.

Therefore, the long-term and short-term oriented culture has its importance and influence in business decision-making. Whether pursuing brand building and market leadership in the long term or focusing on financial performance and business restructuring in the short term, companies should have a clear understanding of their cultural orientation and develop and execute strategies accordingly. In an increasingly global and competitive business environment, companies need the flexibility to balance short—and long-term objectives to ensure competitiveness and sustainability in a changing market.

5. Conclusion

This paper employs the case study method to explore Eastern and Western business communication, identifying cross-cultural differences as the core issue. It outlines factors affecting such communication and proposes strategies for optimization. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, the study compares various cases, concluding that poor communication often results from an unconscious focus on one's own culture and a lack of understanding of the other's social culture.

The complex interplay of cultural dimensions greatly influences business communication between Eastern and Western companies. This paper suggests strategies to enhance cross-cultural interactions by first, learning and adapting to each other's cultural norms, including dress codes and business etiquette. Second, establishing enterprise training mechanisms to improve cross-cultural competence, fostering a positive attitude towards cultural differences and reducing self-centric views. Third, building a harmonious and efficient communication team to promptly address issues in negotiations and maintain communication efficiency. These strategies aim to improve cross-cultural business communication and guide future management measures.

There are still some limitations in this study. The main part chooses to use the case study method for analysis, but the selected cases cannot represent all the problems existing in the business communication between Eastern and Western enterprises or individuals. In addition, the reasons for cross-cultural business communication are complex and numerous, and the research in this paper is difficult to fully reflect the actual situation of transnational cooperation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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