

The Research on the Difference Between Chinese and Western Social Communicative Etiquette as Well as the Causes of Formation

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ABSTRACT

With the development of the social economy and the increasingly frequency of international business activities, more and more people have recognized the importance of learning about some knowledge on social communicative etiquette. And it has become a popular tendency to make a research on the differences between China and Western social communicative etiquette among college teachers or scholars. Starting with the introduction about the definition of etiquette and social communicative etiquette, this thesis mainly makes a detail illustration on the differences between China and Western social communicative etiquette from the following aspects respectively such as addressing, greeting, social interaction, table manners and gift-giving. After that a careful analysis has been made on the causes to result in the above differences from the three aspects one by one including cultural values, religious believes and sense of time or space. Finally, the author has come to a conclusion that such a research will help promote the mutual familiarity or reliance, reducing some unnecessary contradictions or disputes between different countries, which will push forward the world harmony, peace and stabilization certainly.

Keywords: Differences, Social communicative etiquette, China, Western countries, Cultural values.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that social communicative etiquette play an important role both in social daily life and in the international business activities. Consequently, learning about some necessary social communicative etiquette and carrying out the research on the differences of the social communicative etiquette between China and Western countries as well as their causes of formation will not only be favourable to enhance the mutual understanding and trust, decreasing the mutual misunderstanding and conflict between the persons from different cultural backgrounds in the social communication, but also it can strengthen the international exchange and the economical cooperation between different countries, promoting the sustainable and healthy development of the world economy. That is the reason why the author has chosen the difference of the social communicative etiquette between China and

Western countries & their causes of formation as the topic for our research.

2. THE DIFFERENCE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIVE ETIQUETTE BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

Etiquette means some behavioral standard or convention in our daily life in order to stabilize the social governance and keep up the normal social order. And social communicative etiquette refers to a set of rituals, conventions or standards for people to follow in the social communications or in the international business activities to make sure the communications or the activities proceed smoothly and successfully. As well as some universal standards or conventions, social communicative etiquette still has its unique national characteristic. That is, because of different cultural values, religious believes, sense of time or space, social communicative etiquette takes on different

characteristics in different countries or cultures. Specifically speaking, the differences of social communicative etiquette between China and Western Countries are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

2.1 Addressing

China is a country with the history of more than 5000 years, and such a long history has brought up the profound Confucian and Taoist culture, which have still influenced our social life today. As a result, the hierarchical ideology has rooted in the mind of every Chinese person since thousands of years ago. Therefore, according to different social status or social relationship, there are many different kinds of addresses in our daily life. As every knows, all the Chinese names are made up of two parts; one is the family name or the surname; the other is the given name or the first name. Usually, Chinese tend to put their first name behind their family name to show their respect for their family or forefathers. In our daily life, people tend to address each other with the first name or the given name if the two persons are intimate friends, such as "建国", "志强", "国栋", "超凡" and so on. However, if a person's first name has only one character, it is not appropriate for people to address him or her with such a first name. After all, it belongs to the special address between sweethearts or spouses. Full names are usually used when teachers address students or when the elders call the youngsters. In the social communication, most people tend to address others with "小" or "老" adding to their family name, such as "小张", "小李", "老张" and "老刘"[4]. If the persons belong to the ones with some social status or some positions, people usually call them with the family name adding to their titles or ranks, such as "王校长", "李书记", "刘主任" and "张局长". However, if the person has the high standing status or the prestigious reputation in the academic realm or the artistic field, he tends to address him or her with the family name adding to "老", for example "张老" and "王老". If the person is female, she is also called "先生" by most people. In one family, according to different relationships, there are many different kinds of family addresses, such as "爷爷", "奶奶", "外公", "外婆", "爸爸", "妈妈", "叔叔", "婶子", "舅舅", "舅妈", "伯父", "伯母", "姑父", "姑姑", "姨妈", "姨夫". And our family members or relatives can be only called with the corresponding addresses. However, in our daily life, some family addresses can be used in the social communication between different persons, such as "爷爷", "奶奶", "叔叔", "阿姨" etc. However,

for most Westerners, independence, equality are the popular cultural values for them to pursue, which can be reflected clearly in the structure of their names and in the addresses in their daily life. Generally, most Westerners' names are made up of three parts, the first name, the middle name as well as the family name, and Westerners usually place their first names before their family names. In their social life, it is natural to address others with the first names directly both in the family and in the company. Even it is common for a son to call his father's first name or an employee to call the employer's first name directly, which is an unimaginable thing in China. Here, calling others' first name directly is just an embodiment of equality and democracy, which can shorten the distance between different persons further. As for the family addresses, unlike so many different kinds in China, there are only a few ones such as daddy, mummy, grandpa, grandma, uncle and aunt which can be used for addressing all the family members. In the social communication, Westerners tend to address men or women with Mr, Mrs, or Miss adding to their family name, such as "Mr Brown or Mrs Smith"[1]. For the persons with the higher position, they usually address them with the title or the rank adding to their family name such as "President Clinton, Professor Johnson and Doctor Miller". But in most cases, Westerners often address others just with their titles or ranks, such as "Sir", "Madam", "Doctor", "Professor" or "President" and so on.

2.2 Greeting

For most Chinese, when people come across their friends or some acquaintances in their daily lives, what they usually do is just to make a greeting by saying "Where are you from? Or "What are you doing?". If people encounter each other during the meal time, they usually make a greeting by asking "Have you ever had the meal?" In most Chinese's eyes, the above sentences stand for nothing but greetings to show the courtesy concern about friends, colleagues or acquaintances[5]. However, these greetings usually make Westerners feel confused and misunderstood. If you ask them "Where are you from?" or "What are you doing?", in their opinions, these affairs have nothing to do with you and you are interfering with their freedom by putting forward these questions. If you ask a foreigner "Have you ever had the meal?" during the meal time, perhaps he will feel a little strange and even he tends to think whether you are going to invite him or her to a dinner. As for most

Westerners, when people meet or encounter each other, they tend to make a greeting to each other by saying "How do you do!" "How are you?", "Hello", "Hi!", "Good morning" or "Morning" to show their concerns or friendliness[5]. When it comes to greeting rituals, in ancient China, people used to make a fist and palm salutation when they encountered each other. In the modern society, hand-shaking has become a popular greeting ceremony with most Chinese persons just like Westerners. For example, if two good friends or colleagues meet in the street, it is usual for them to shake their hands tightly for at least a few minutes or even more than ten minutes sometimes to show our deep friendship. In contrast, most Westerners tend to withdraw their hands immediately only after they shake the hands for one or two minutes in order to avoid the unnecessary mutual embarrassment. As well as hand-shaking, Westerners usually express their friendliness or warmth by hugging or kissing the forehead or the mutual cheeks in the social communication or in the international situation. Whereas, in China only the intimate friends who haven't seen for many years tend to hug each other with the fists knocking at the mutual shoulders to express their close friendship and deep affection.

2.3 Social Interaction

In China, when the persons meet for the first time, it is usual to talk about jobs, ages, income, marriages or families, which is a symbol to show concerns about others. For example, people usually make use of the word "高寿" for asking about the old person's age while they tend to use the word "芳龄" to talk about a girl's age. However, the topics such as ages, income, health, marriages or families belong to the private affairs to Westerners. It is a taboo to involve the above topics in the conversation; if so, most Westerners will feel offended or unpleasant, which will have a negative influence on the social communication or the interpersonal relationship. In the Chinese culture, respecting and concerning about the old persons has been a traditional virtue since the ancient time and the old are usually regarded as the symbol of lots of experiences and wisdom. Thus, it is the responsibility for all the young persons to take good care of the old and show their respects. On the bus it is common for the young to give their seats to the old; at the dinner it is necessary to let the old or the senior to take the main seat. And in our daily life, such idioms or sayings are often heard such as "宝刀未老", "老当益壮" "姜还是老的辣" and so on, which

show their higher status in the mind of most ordinary people. However, in Western countries, what people pay great attention to is what will happen in the future. Consequently, compared with the young persons, it is difficult for the old to be emphasized in their daily life. Furthermore, the old persons would not like themselves to be thought old. If people offer a seat for an old person to take, he or she is sure to be offended. After all, all the persons want to be young forever in others' mind. And it is easier to find some euphemism like the seniors in the public situation. In addition, while paying a visit to Westerners, it is necessary just make an appointment in advance in case that their work or lives will not be disturbed. After the visitors arrive and enter the house, it's a good manner to take off the coat or the hat. If not, the host tends to think that the visitors will leave in a few minutes. When the host offers them some tea or coffee, they can tell what they want directly. And if they don't need, it's all right to say "No, thank you"[1]. If Westerners invite some persons to have a dinner at the house, what they need to pay attention to is just not to be overcautious out of politeness or nervousness because most Westerners never talk the guests into having the food again and again like most Chinese do. Also, all of the guests should remember not to leave any food or dishes on the plate, which is easier to make Westerners think that what they have cooked is not suitable to our tastes. Conversely, for most Chinese, it is not necessary to care about too many issues when paying a visit to good friends. Sometimes it is possible for people to come to their good friends' house without informing them in advance in order to make a surprising pleasure. After coming into the friends' house, it is usual for them to offer some drinks such as a cup of tea or a glass of hot water. If you feel thirsty, you can drink it freely, and even if you don't drink it, your friends will never mind it. While having a dinner with your friends in their house, if you don't like some dishes, you can leave them on the plates freely, which will never offend your friends.

2.4 Table Manners

As everybody knows, it is not so frequent for most Chinese to get together for having a dinner. Only when they spend some festivals such as Spring Festival and Mid-autumn Day, holding the wedding or celebrating the new baby's birth, can they invite all the good friends or relatives to have the dinner. As well, it is possible for them to invite their good friends to dinners so as to express our

gratitude for their help or deepen the friendship. However, it is not as formal as the dinner in Western countries, and people can decide to go out for a dinner at any time as long as their friends are free. At the formal banquet, the seniors or the persons with the higher status tend to take the main seat which usually lies at the center of the table and faces towards the door. After all the guests are seated, they usually wait for the host to make an opening remark. After that, he will declare the beginning of the banquet, then the persons begin to eat[10]. During the banquet, all the people at the table must pay great attention to their manners. For example, it is not polite to help themselves attentively without taking care of others, instead, it is necessary for them to pay attention to the communication with others at the table. As the host of the banquet, it is appropriate to talk the guests into having dishes again and again and even put the food into the guests' plates for showing his warmth or friendliness. Here, the point to take notice of is just to make use of the public chopsticks when taking the food for the guests in order not to make them feel uncomfortable. Also it is not a good manner to make a hiccup or pick the teeth in front of all the guests at the table[7]. If drinking, all the persons need to control their capacity for liquor properly, and it should be banned from drinking so much as to forget themselves. As well, they'd better inform the host privately if they want to leave earlier, and it is a bad manner to leave ourselves without informing the host. While leaving from the banquet, it is best to express our gratitude to the host by saying "Thank you for your warm hospitality! The food is so delicious!" etc[8]. In the West, if people want to invite their friends or colleagues to have a dinner. The first thing to do is just to make an appointment with them to set the time and the place[6]. If it is a formal banquet, it is also necessary to decide the number of the guests and the menu according to the guests' different tastes. When going to have the dinner or attending the banquet, it is necessary to let the women take the seat firstly; the gentlemen need to pull the chairs for the ladies. At the table, the hostess is the real dominating person who tends to take the main seat and declare the beginning of the dinner or the banquet. During the meal, people should be forbidden to talk and laugh loudly or make any noise with knives or forks. Also, they should try to avoid scattering the salt onto the table, for salt stands for wealth or fortune, and scattering the salt means the loss of treasures or money. In addition, it is impolite or inelegant to talk with others with the food in the mouth, and it is not graceful to make

some sound while chewing the food in the mouth especially drinking the soup[4]. When the dinner or the banquet is over, it is common for the host and the guests to write thank-you notes to each other for showing their sincere gratitude mutually.

2.5 Gift-giving

It is well known that gift-giving is a very usual social communication. In china there has been a saying like "Courtesy calls for reciprocity" since the ancient time, showing that the ancient Chinese laid emphasis on the importance of gift-giving greatly thousands of years ago. Not only can it help to show the respect or gratitude to others, but also it is beneficial to strengthen the mutual relationship. In our daily life, most people would like to send the expensive gifts especially between intimate friends in spite of a popular saying "Even a goose feather from thousands of miles can convey the great affection" in ancient China. It seems that only by sending the expensive gifts can their mutual deep friendship be manifested fully or completely. When accepting the gift, most Chinese usually show the reluctance or refuse it again and again, ; they will not open the gift in the presence of the gift-giver[2]. As for gifts, it is appropriate to choose them according to the social status, life habits and personal interests of the gift-receives. For the old persons who celebrate the birthday, it is offensive and impolite to send clocks to them for clocks sound like the Chinese character "终" which means being dead. Sending an umbrella to a young couple at the wedding will offend the bride and the groom because umbrella has the similar pronunciation to the Chinese character "伞" implying that the young couples will part with each other in the end. Finally pears or peaches are not suitable for the festival gifts for both the two kinds of fruits have the inauspicious meaning. For most Westerners, what they pay great attention to is not the gift itself but the real meaning to convey. Therefore, people are forbidden to send the expensive gifts to others in Western countries. Once you send the expensive ones to them, it is easier for you to be thought to be making a bribery. In Germany, the persons have to pay taxes to the government for sending much too expensive gifts. While accepting gifts, Westerners tend to open the presents in front of the gift-givers and show the gratitude; it is not a good manner to accept the gift and put it aside[2]. Also, it is impolite to send some gifts with the logo of the company, which is usually to be mistaken for making an advertisement for the company. In addition, it is not permitted for men to send some

cosmetics to women, which is easier to be taken for having an ambiguous relationship between them. Finally, it should be avoided sending some discount gifts to others, which is easier to make them feel looked down upon.

3. THE CAUSES FOR THE DIFFERENCE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIVE ETIQUETTE BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

When it comes to the causes for the differences of the social communicative etiquette between China and Western Countries, it is necessary to take them into consideration from different aspects comprehensively. Generally speaking, these differences have something to do with cultural values, religious believes, and sense of time or space. The following is just a detail illustration about the causes respectively.

3.1 Cultural Values

It is well known that China is famous for its long history of more than 5000 years and its profound traditional culture. As the representative of the ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucianism has still had a great influence on all the aspects of our social life[6]. "Benevolence" and "Ritual" are the main kernels of Confucianism. For "Benevolence", it means loving every person around you, and such kind of affection starts with loving your parents as well as your brothers or sisters. That is to say, all of people should have a kind heart and try our best to lend a warm hand to every person who is in need of help. That is the reason why most Chinese advocate the behaviors to provide the timely help for anyone in trouble to rescue the endangered and support the poor. On basis of "Benevolence", "filial piety" has been developed further which means respecting our parents and taking the responsibility of supporting our parents especially when they are very old. As well, filial piety also includes the meaning of treating your brothers or sisters very well and showing respect to all the old persons in the society. When it comes to "ritual", it emphasizes the establishment of a stable social order, under which all the persons need to follow a certain behavioral standard or regulation. And on the basis of "ritual" has formed the whole feudal hierarchical system, producing the far-reaching hierarchical ideology which has rooted in the mind of most Chinese persons. That can explain why the young need to

give the seat to the old on the bus and why the senior or the persons with the higher social status tend to take the main seat at the banquet. What's more, all the Chinese have advocated the spirit of collectivism, emphasizing that the individual interests need to follow the collective ones and the individual value can only be realized through making a great contribution to the whole society. As a result, Chinese persons tend to put their family name before their first name for the family glory is much more important than their own achievement. For Westerners, individuality, independence and freedom are the popular cultural value[9]. Therefore, most of them pay great attention to the maintenance of the personal right and the protection of the personal privacy. It is not so difficult to understand why Westerners put their first name before their family name and why most of them have such a strong privacy-protecting ideology that nobody want to involve the topics such as age, health, income, marriage and family in the conversation.

3.2 Religious Believes

China is a diverse country in religious believes, and Taoism is the only indigenous religion. According to the Taoist, The essence of the universe is just Dao which is contained all the things in the world, dominating the birth, growth, maturity and death of everything. Therefore, it is necessary for the mankind to follow "Dao" instead of fighting against it. That's to say, what the human being need to do is just to learn how to follow the natural law and get along well with the nature as well as the persons around us. That's the reason why most Chinese would try their best to maintain the harmony rather than initiate a conflict especially in the public situation. Then it is easier to understand why the atmosphere at the wedding or at the banquet tends to be fervent and friendly with all the people talking or laughing happily and loudly. It is also not difficult to understand why all the Chinese must return home and have a reunion with their family members when Spring Festival or Mid-autumn Day comes. In contrast, Christianity is the most important religion in Western countries, which has had a far-reaching influence on the life style, value orientation and thinking method of all Westerners[10]. As a result, freedom and equality have become their main cultural values, and exploiting the new territory to obtain as much wealth as possible has become their life pursuit. Consequently, all the Westerners regard freedom and equality as the valuable things as their lives. So,

both in one family and in one company, children can address their fathers or grandfathers with their first names, and the employees can call their managers or employers by names directly without any titles or ranks. And when the children decide to make a girl friend or get married, it is not necessary to consult with their parents because such things belong to their own affairs which have nothing to do with their parents. It belongs to their own freedom to choose their future spouses for getting married, and nobody has the right to interfere with it as far as Westerners are concerned.

3.3 Sense of Time or Space

In terms of time orientation, China belongs to the past-oriented culture, which emphasizes the accumulation of knowledge or experience and the inheritance of the cultural heritage. As a result, all the Chinese persons pay great attention to the learning of knowledge and the acquisition of the traditional handicraft; all of them tend to respect the teachers, doctors or craftsmen with lots of experience[3]. Then it can be seen that people prefer the old ones with lots of experiences while seeing a doctor, choosing a teacher for their children or getting the haircut. And all the old persons have gained the respect in the whole society. On the bus it is common for the young persons to stand up and give the seats to the old; at the dinner the old persons usually take the main seat. As well, Chinese culture belongs to poly-chronic time culture, under which people usually take a flexible attitude toward the time schedule, spending too much time in making a good interpersonal relationship. That is the reason why most Chinese would not like to be confined by the time schedule, instead they are ready to keep in contact with their good friends as often as possible even at the cost of occupying some work time. However, most Western countries belong to the future-oriented time culture and the mono-chronic time system. In their opinion, tomorrow and future are the most important. As long as they work hard, they are sure to achieve a great success and have a happy life. In addition, time stands for money or treasure, which can be cut into different segments and can be calculated by means of seconds, minutes and hours[3]. So, nobody wants to be disturbed by others during the work time in Western countries, and if you want to pay a visit to a Western friend, you need to make an appointment in advance. As for sense of space, China belongs to the country with the medium distance culture whereas most Western countries belong to the ones with the long

distance culture. As a result. Westerners have much stronger personal space ideology than most Chinese persons. For examples it is usual for Chinese to be in the crowded environment while taking the bus, the subway or the elevator, and in face of such a crowded situation, few of them feel uncomfortable or frightened. But, most Westerners are afraid of such a crowded situation, and they tend to exclude the physical contact instinctively. On the crowded buses, subways or elevators, they usually take their bodies back closely by hunching their shoulders and putting up their hands so as not to touch others as much as possible. Once touching others carelessly, they will say "sorry" immediately. What's more, when meeting good friends, Westerners tend to shake the hands with each other for a short time and separate their hands right away but Chinese persons can shake their hands for a long time to show their deep friendship. During the conversation, Westerners usually keep a longer distance to maintain a large independence personal space while most Chinese keep the shorter distance to make their communication more convenient.

4. CONCLUSION

As the popular behavioral standard or convention, social communicative etiquette are being more and more important both in our daily life and in the international business activities. Therefore, it is very significant to learn about some knowledge about social communicative etiquette and carry out the research on the differences of social communicative etiquette between China and Western countries, which is certain to be favourable to get rid of the mutual bias and enhance the mutual understanding between different cultures, working hard together to build up the common community with the shared future for the mankind.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Jingguang Li.

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