

The Phenomenon of Culture Shock in Intercultural Communication and the Countermeasures

Shujuan Zhang^{1, a, *}

¹School of Foreign Studies, Jiangsu Normal University, Xuzhou, 221000, China

^a444702812@qq.com

Abstract

When a person leaves the familiar culture, culture shock will appear, which is a necessary stage for foreigners to integrate into the foreign culture circle. Culture shock has a great impact on people's body and mind. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, culture shock has become a huge obstacle. The key to solve the problem of culture shock is to look directly at the problem, cultivate intercultural communicative competence, and inspire the awareness of intercultural communication from the cognitive and experiential levels. In the process of culture shock, we should adjust our mentality timely and actively, correctly understand and pay attention to the problems, quickly establish our own strategies to deal with the crisis, and gradually integrate into the cross-cultural communication circle. In view of the importance of overcoming culture shock, the emphasis here is on the causes and solutions of culture shock.

Keywords

Culture shock, intercultural communication, adaptation.

1. Chapter One Introduction

1.1. General Statement

Culture shock refers to the loneliness, anxiety and confusion that people experience when they first come to different cultural environments. In a foreign country, you don't know what to do, who to ask for help, and your daily habits have changed, and you get frustrated from time to time. In fact, culture shock refers to the prelude to full integration into the new culture, which usually includes four stages: the honeymoon stage, the crisis stage, the recovery stage and the adaptation stage. The severity and adaptation time of culture shock also vary according to individual personality, language expression ability, spiritual support, length of stay and the difference between mother culture and other cultures.

1.2. The Need for the Study

With the convenience of modern transportation, international tourism is becoming more and more popular. There are more and more cross-border job opportunities, and exchanges between countries are more and more frequent. However, due to the different cultural heritage between different nationalities, cultural differences exist for a long time. Culture shock refers to the uneasiness or other negative emotions when familiar social cues, habits and cultural structures are lost, confused or disappeared in some way, and someone is forced to live under a new and unfamiliar condition. On this topic, the education community has done a lot of research to explore how culture shock will occur. Studies have shown that culture shock will occur when any major changes appear, such as moving from the countryside to the city, leaving high school to enter university, and even transiting from student life to work life, not only when traveling to and from foreign countries.

1.3. The Overall Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of five parts. The first chapter is mainly the introduction, which includes the general statement, the need for the study, and the structure of the thesis. The second one is a literature review, focusing on definitions of key terms, such as culture shock, host culture, home culture, the reverse culture and so on; stages of culture shock which includes the honeymoon stage, the crisis stage, the recovery stage and the adaptation stage; physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms of culture shock; and types of response in different culture, including self-centered type, escape type, self-loss type, and adaptive type. Chapter three mainly talks about causes of culture shock: different values, norms and beliefs, stereotype and prejudice, ethnocentrism, and misunderstanding of nonverbal communication. The fourth chapter is strategies for managing culture shock, consisting mainly of the following: deepening the understanding of yourself, identifying different aspects of different cultures, keeping an open, flexible mind, seeking common ground among different cultures, seeking necessary assistance. Chapter five makes a conclusion. Culture shock is inevitable in cross-cultural communication. Proper measures should be taken to reduce the negative effects of culture shock.

2. Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Key Terms

2.1.1. Culture Shock

Cultural shock is a concept first proposed by American anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1958. Culture shock is 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.

Culture shock is caused by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Those signs or cues include the thousand and one ways with which we are familiar in the situation of daily life: how to give orders, how to make purchases, when and when not to respond. These cues, which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms, are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, often without our conscious awareness.

After World War II, with the large flow of people, a large number of immigrants emerged. They moved from one country to another, from one cultural background to another. What is waiting for them is many cross-cultural social and psychological problems. Therefore, the term of culture shock came into being.

Culture shocks are multifaceted, ranging from climate, diet, language, dress to behaviour, population density, political and economic circumstances. In a new cultural environment, culture shocks have left the victims at a loss, and even the entire psychological balance and value judgment criteria are lost.

2.1.2. Host Culture, Home Culture

Host culture refers to the culture of the country where you are living or temporarily living or the culture in another country that you wish to acquire. For example, if Chinese students want to learn British and American culture, it is called host culture.

Home culture refers to the original mainstream culture in one's birthplace. For example, if Chinese students want to learn British and American culture, Chinese culture is called home culture.

2.1.3. The Reverse Culture Shock, Catatonia

The reverse culture shock refers to the maladaptation to the environment in the early stage of returning to motherland. The collision and impact of the foreign culture and the mother culture before their return make the returnees need some time to adapt to the native culture when facing the mother environment at the beginning of the return. The vast majority of returnees who experience the baptism of foreign cultures will encounter a certain degree of re-adaptation pressure. Some people's conditions are serious and even need timely treatment.

Catatonia is a group of qualitative disorder of mental movement and will, including stereotype, affectation, automatic obedience, stiffness, imitation action, mutism, recalcitrance, and impulsive behavior, etc. These phenomena can occur in the context of excessive, too little or no exercise. This disease is not limited to schizophrenia, but can also be seen in organic encephalopathy (such as encephalitis), other somatic diseases and affective disorders. Only a few patients have severe symptoms that affect work and life.

2.1.4. Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanism is the language of psychoanalytic school. It refers to the psychological mechanism used by individuals to avoid interference and maintain psychological balance when the mind is disturbed. The defense mechanism was first proposed by Freud and often used in the unconscious state, such as suppression, projection, transfer and so on.

Interpersonal interactions is the interaction between people. Human interaction may be the communication of psychological factors such as information, emotion, or behavior action. Interpersonal interaction is a process, which is composed of self-interaction, interpersonal interaction and social interaction. Interpersonal interaction refers to people's communication in psychology and behavior, which is a field of social psychology research, and emphasizes role interaction even more in structure.

2.2. Stages of Culture Shock

The process of culture shock goes through four stages:

2.2.1. The Honeymoon Stage

When people have just arrived in a new environment, they experience psychological excitement and emotional upsurge because of freshness. This stage usually lasts from several weeks to six months. People often look forward to living and working in different countries before they go to other countries. After coming to a foreign cultural environment, they feel curious, surprised, interested to see everything and are in the state of excitement, satisfaction. Everything is good in their minds. So it is called the optimistic "honeymoon" stage.

2.2.2. The Crisis Stage

Fresh feelings have passed and new comers begin to feel unaccustomed to food, clothing, housing and traveling, and unfamiliar with anything around them. Language estrangement, confusion, depression, loneliness, loss, worry, anxiety, sadness and homesickness mood are produced. Thus, some adopt a negative attitude of avoidance, do not contact the local people and local culture; some are hostile to the local culture, or even vent their dissatisfaction, take irrational actions; some can not bear the psychological pressure to leave the cultural environment and return to their own country. These are the concrete manifestations of "culture shock". In addition to psychological adverse reactions, some people will also produce physiological reactions, appear dizziness, headache, limb fatigue, abnormal diet and rest. This stage is a great psychological and physical test for people who have just entered a foreign cultural environment. People in a different cultural environment generally have to experience this period of frustration and culture shock, but the form and degree of culture shock is not exactly the same about different people. The more you know about cultural differences, the less frustration you will meet. For the vast majority of people, the stages of frustration and shock

can be passed. It should be noted that generally there will be no "shock" stage for people who have short-term travel, because they just have an overview of the scenery, and may have been staying in the "honeymoon" stage. When the trip is over, the excitement has not disappeared.

2.2.3. The Recovery Stage

After a period of frustration, people begin to adjust their relationship with the environment and find ways to adapt to the new living and cultural environment. With their language level improving, they begin to be familiar with food, taste, sound, local customs and habits and other non-verbal forms. They are gradually clear that there are not only shortcomings in foreign culture, but also advantages. With their contact with the local people increasing, they begin to make friends, and the sense of loneliness and loss has eased. Their view for the second culture is neither as romantic and impractical as the honeymoon stage, nor as disgusted and dissatisfied as the shock stage, and their understanding of the culture is gradually deepening.

2.2.4. The Adaptation Stage

After a period of adjustment, people gradually feel accustomed to the living environment, increasingly adapt to the second culture, basically can take a more objective attitude, and even accept part of the second culture. They are able to communicate freely in another cultural environment and interact with people in other cultural backgrounds so that living in another environment has become their second nature, which is a real "double culture", and also the highest stage of intercultural communication.

That is to say, the phenomenon of "shock" in culture is short-lived. After a period of adjustment, people will gradually adapt to the work and living environment of different cultures, and use the language of different cultures to communicate freely, and objectively view the differences between different cultures.

The study on the process of cultural adaptation reveals that we must pay attention to cultural differences and the influence of culture shock on second language learning in the early stage. For the difficulties encountered by second language learners in the process of cultural adaptation, we should fully understand and help them come through the period of culture shock, which is conducive to the smooth development of second language learning.

2.3. Symptoms of Culture Shock

The symptoms of culture shock consist of physical symptoms of culture shock, psychological symptoms of culture shock and behavioral symptoms of culture shock.

2.3.1. Physical Symptoms of Culture Shock

Physical symptoms are often caused by the differences of climate, food, water and even the differences of the plants in surroundings, which is a naturally physical reaction towards the changes of the environment, such as headaches, allergies, fatigue, diarrhea, nausea, sweating, catatonia, overeating, loss of appetite, frequent minor illnesses, a need for excessive sleep or insomnia, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, abdominal pain (especially in children), and so on.

2.3.2. Psychological Symptoms of Culture Shock

There are many psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments, such as helpless, boredom, loneliness, vulnerable, melancholy, disorientation, dissatisfaction, heightened irritability, hostility towards the host culture, unwillingness to interact with others, feelings of inadequacy or insecurity, a sense of being overwhelmed or frustrated, feelings of being unimportant and overlooked, extreme homesickness, desire for home or old friends, sudden intense feeling of loyalty to own culture, etc.

2.3.3. Behavioral Symptoms of Culture Shock

Behavioral symptoms are a combination of physical symptoms and psychological symptoms of culture shock. Some strange features are usually shown, such as staring blankly, unexplainable

crying, loss of sense of humor, difficulty with concentration, lack of self-belief or confidence, rebellion against rules and authority, constant complaints about everything, loss of ability to work or study effectively, inability to solve simple problems during daily life, refusal to learn the language, developing obsessions such as over-cleanliness, excessive concern over health and security, withdrawal from people, spending too much time alone in their room (only socializing with people from their home country), etc.

2.4. Types of Response in a Different Culture

The response to exposure to different cultures varies from person to person. Seriously speaking, the kinds of cultural shock is the same as the number of psychological reactions. However, generally they can be divided into the following types: self-centered type, escape type, self-loss type and adaptive type.

2.4.1. Self-centered Type

This type of person is characterized by the fact that when they encounter habits and values that conflict with their own culture, they can not objectively evaluate different cultures, but completely deny them. Then the foreign culture is criticized in the form of "this is different from our habits". Such people always try to avoid contact with local people, let alone actively adapt to local customs and learn their language.

2.4.2. Escape Type

This type of personality is mostly introverted or self-enclosed. They always feel a mental stress when they come into contact with the local people, so they especially like to be with people from their own country. When the culture shock is strong, it is extremely easy to cause mental depression. According to the statistics of mental health doctor Kondo Yu, the current rate of mental depression among people living abroad is quite alarming. In psychology of culture shock, he described it as follows : " life abroad is more or less stressful, and the degree of tension varies from person to person, but all people experience the pain and sorrow of being uprooted, losing their familiar social environment, customs, relatives and friends, etc ."

2.4.3. Self-loss Type

This type of people first hold a strong sense of inferiority to themselves and their own culture. Therefore, they always try to cover up the heterogeneity of their own culture in the face of different cultures and try to integrate themselves into different cultures. They have a strong sense of inferiority in their own culture, hoping to achieve self-protection by assimilating themselves into different cultures. Such people try to imitate the local people in all aspects, such as conversation, behavior and lifestyle, and avoid contact with people from their own country. Even when talking to people from their own country, they always avoid using their mother tongue. People of this type are mostly young people who lack knowledge of their own culture. After returning to their own country, they also often measured the value of their own culture by the judgment of "how others do it" in different cultures. In fact, such people not only know nothing about their own culture, but also understand little about different cultures.

2.4.4. Adaptive Type

This type of person neither denies the value of a different culture like a self-centered person, nor escapes reality like an escapist, nor denies the value of his own culture like a self-loss person. They are able to interact with the compatriot and the local people, and try to understand the characteristics of different cultures and adapt themselves to the new environment as soon as possible. They pay great attention to the equality between people and refuse to compare the advantages and disadvantages of culture. They try to not only enrich the knowledge of different cultures, but also re-understand the characteristics of their own culture through the contact with different cultures so as to deepen the objective understanding of their

own culture. Therefore, it can be said that adaptive talents really have the qualification as "international people".

3. Chapter Three Causes of Culture Shock

3.1. Different Values, Norms and Beliefs

Culture itself can not communicate. Only individuals from various cultures can communicate with each other, which is intercultural communication. Everyone has a unique way of communicating, but the mother culture gives its all members a substantially identical way. We are often unaware of the influence of mother culture on us, and others are also deeply influenced by their mother culture. Time, work, competition, equality, materialism, and individualism are at the heart of most westerner's value systems, while oriental values family's harmony and collectivism more. Therefore, when the two sides are talking, Westerners usually appear impatient with the hesitancy of the Orientals, who complain that the Westerners are eager to draw conclusions. Norms are the rules that guide behavior, which tell people what must be done and what can not be done.

3.2. Stereotype and Prejudice

Sometimes, negative reactions don't come from real interaction but from a fixed, preconceived view of others. Stereotype exists in almost all intercultural communication situations, the cause of which is that human beings have the psychological needs about classification. People get prototypes and develop them from television, movies, textbooks or reviews of relatives and friends. Some films, for example, portray the United States as a country full of rich people and everyone has guns, and some jokes are always mocking Jewish ingenuity. In fact, many similar understandings of a particular culture are incorrect because they are based on very few people or come from very limited interpersonal communication. Stereotype makes people unable to see the unique characteristics of individuals and often leads to prejudice. When it comes to religion, race, political rights, education and so on, many people tend to be biased and discriminate against people from other cultural groups.

3.3. Ethnocentrism

In China, respect for the elderly and love for the young is a traditional virtue, and parents at least have to raise their children until they get married, while in the United States, 18 years old is a symbol that parents will no longer provide everything for them. People from different cultures hold different opinions. Some Orientals argue that the Westerners are irresponsible while Chinese children do not learn to be independent at the right age in the eyes of Westerners. Here is actually a manifestation of ethnocentrism. People think that their own culture is the best and their own behavior model is the best. This judgment with a sense of superiority always results in unfair comparison, that is, belittling others to elevate themselves.

3.4. Misunderstanding of Nonverbal Communication

Intercultural communication has two forms: verbal and non-verbal communication. Language communication includes both oral and written, and nonverbal communication is expressed through body language, such as gestures, distance, silence, eyes, posture, and even ways of wearing. Although some nonverbal communication behaviors seem natural, people of different cultures have different views on what behavior is appropriate. In terms of distance between people, people will decide for themselves who can be close to them and who can not. When private space is violated, people react differently: back off or get angry. People's reaction is not only the expression of personality, but also the expression of their respective cultural backgrounds. Middle Easterners, especially Arabs, are very close to each other while talking. However, the Arabs are so close to themselves that they can even see them blink clearly, which

makes Westerners feel uncomfortable. Because these nonverbal communication behaviors are too common, we usually don't realize them.

4. Chapter Four Strategies for Managing Culture Shock

4.1. Deepening the Understanding of Yourself

Different regions, environments and histories make different countries form unique cultural traditions and characteristics. "Some of the natural things in our culture need a lot of effort to be transplanted into other cultures," Wang Zuoliang once said. People are the product of culture and understanding their own culture helps communication. When interacting with others, we should make clear our views and attitudes towards the people and things around us, comment as objectively as possible, and listen to the opinions of others so as to improve our intercultural communication ability and easily overcome the culture shock.

4.2. Identifying Different Aspects of Different Cultures

Each culture has its own characteristics in traditions, customs, values, beliefs and norms, so it is difficult for people from other cultural backgrounds to perceive, understand and practice these details. Failure to communicate fully with the local people is an important reason for not adapting to different cultures. To survive successfully in a strange country, it is essential to speak the local language. In addition, some people think that their foreign language has been mastered very well, but after going abroad, they find it difficult to understand the the local people. Why? Because every language has a dialect. People are quite tolerant of mistakes in the grammar and pronunciation of foreigners, but they think that it is impolite and rude to violate conversation and cultural rules. We are always proud of our own culture and can not bear the contempt of others for mother culture. Likewise, people all over the world hold the same view. As Confucius said, " Do not impose what you do not want on others." Since cultural differences are inevitable, we should try to understand and respect them as much as possible.

4.3. Keeping an Open, Flexible Mind

People are always uncomfortable with foreign cultures, but at no time should we comment on local cultures with superiority or inferiority. A culture can exist so far, which must have its rationality. Therefore, no matter what kind of culture, we must hold a tolerant attitude and strive to appreciate and obtain beneficial things from it. Furthermore, in order to break down prejudices against different cultures, it would be a good way to engage deeply with people from different religions, races or cultures.

4.4. Seeking Common Ground Among Different Cultures

There is no doubt that it is our common ground but not our differences that leads to successful communication. There are always things abroad that are better or more interesting than those at home. Therefore, paying more attention to the positive aspects of a different culture will make you fall in love with and adapt to this culture. People from different cultures have similar emotions and experiences. We are all connected by family and friendship. We all face birth, senility, illness and death. We all love music, art, sports and peace. Overall we are similar and we should seek a common ground for communication to reduce the negative impact of culture shock.

4.5. Seeking Necessary Assistance

No one is an island and we always depend on each other one way or another. People who go abroad must have strong feelings at the adaptation stage. You have to experience a lot of physical and psychological discomfort and pain. Meanwhile, you urgently need the comfort and help of relatives and friends. In fact, in this case you can turn to the local people for help, and

they usually help you enthusiastically. You can talk to them about how you feel, and they will tell you a lot of useful things and spare no effort to help you solve your difficulties. Don't wait for others to help you, and ask for help when you need it.

5. Chapter Five Conclusion

The globalization of economy, the contraction of time and space, and the emergence of global village make the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds more frequent and the social life more extensive. With the increasingly frequent international exchanges in politics, economy, culture, education, science and technology, cross-cultural communication will become an important part of people's life. The situation of world cultural development will not be independent, but will form a situation of multi-cultural coexistence under mutual influence. This development has brought about two aspects of influence: on the one hand, the trend of cultural information exchange, integration and learning from each other between different countries and nationalities is developing rapidly; on the other hand, cultural collision and maladjustment are floating on the surface. The success of cross-cultural communication lies in the use of different cultural advantages and the elimination of cultural conflicts. Cultural exchanges and mutual influence between different nationalities are milestones in cultural development. It is the most basic cultural attitudes in this era of globalization to recognize and accept multi-cultures and fully understand and respect different human civilizations. Economic globalization can not eliminate the conflicts between different countries and nations, and in some cases may aggravate the conflicts between them. Culture shock is an objective phenomenon, which can not be avoided or stopped. But at the same time, culture shock also promotes the development of national culture and realizes the cultural integration.

In short, living in a different culture, it is inevitable to have culture shock. It's a painful process to experience the four stages of culture shock, but you've also learned how to interact with people from different cultures and understood all aspects of different cultures, all of which makes you know more about yourself. Meanwhile, we must not completely submit to different cultures and the correct attitude to culture shock is to bravely face, actively adapt and critically accept.

Bibliography

- [1] Oberg, K. Culture shock: adjustment to new cultural environment. *Practical Anthropologist*, 1960(7): 177- 182.
- [2] Tylor, E. *Primitive Culture*. London: John Murray, 1871. p14.
- [3] Hofstede, G. *Culture's Consequences*. London and Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984. p65.
- [4] Samovar, L. et al. *Understanding Intercultural Communication*. CA: Wadsworth. 1981. p155.
- [5] Hu Wenzhong. *International Communication and What It Means to Us* [J]. In *International Communication*. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press, 1988.
- [6] Samovar Larry A, et al. *Communication Between Cultures*. China: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and Thomson Learning Asia, 2000.
- [7] Adler, P. S. *The Transitional Experience: An Alternative View of Culture Shock* [J]. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1975, 15(4).
- [8] Ward, C., Bochner, S., Furnham, A. *The Psychology of Culture Shock* [M]. London: Routledge, 2001.
- [9] Cole, M. *Culture and Cognitive Development: From Cross-Cultural Research to Creating Systems of Cultural Mediation* [J]. *Culture & Psychology*, 1995, 1(1).

[10] Gaw, Kevin F. Reverse Culture Shock in Students Returning from Overseas [J]. 2000.