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Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Culture shock in intercultural business communication

A focus on interactions between Western and East Asian workers

Auteur: Jessica Debaty
Promotrice: Sylvie De Cock
Année académique 2021-2022
Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation générale. Finalité spécialisée en langues des affaires

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∞ Acknowledgements

As I bring this thesis to a close, there are some people that I would like to thank personally for their valuable contribution throughout this academic year.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Sylvie De Cock, for the precious guidance and the great help she brought to the writing of this work.

Secondly, I would like to thank Hauliga's CEO, Dr Terry Lidarssi, for the time he dedicated to me and for all the fascinating stories abroad that he shared with me.

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INTRODUCTION

As the world has witnessed a rapid phenomenon of globalisation in the last decades, developing cross-border trade and connecting countries through economic partnerships, it is becoming increasingly common for workers to do business overseas, leaving their home country for a completely new environment in which they quickly face an unknown language and different codes of conduct. In these circumstances, it is not rare for businesspeople to experience a sense of disorientation, more commonly called *culture shock*. This phenomenon is frequently addressed in the literature on intercultural communication, but the extent to which workers can experience it in a foreign business workplace is rather vague: "is culture shock frequent?"; "can it be avoided?"; "what are the most common causes of it?". Overall, many questions linked to the experience of culture shock remain unanswered, which implies the need to conduct further research on the subject.

In this dissertation, cultural aspects that are likely to trigger culture shock in foreign workers will be discussed to propose strategies that could counteract it. As Western and Asian cultures are traditionally opposed to each other in the literature on intercultural communication (as can be seen in the works of Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall, for example), the scope of the research was reduced to Western businesspeople working in East Asia. In line with this focus, three East Asian countries will be investigated in the framework of the thesis: China, Japan, and South Korea. Although the term "Western" can relate to different regions of the world, data linked to the United States will mainly be considered to compare cultures in the theoretical part. This selection was made on the basis that the United States is frequently identified as a typical "Western" country in cross-cultural research, and ultimately aims for more practicability.

As a way to introduce cultural differences that are frequently emphasised between Western and East Asian cultures, Chapter 1 of the theoretical part will present and discuss the results of two frameworks of intercultural communication: *High-context and Low-context cultures* by Edward T. Hall, and the *Cultural Dimensions Theory* by Geert Hofstede. A definition of culture shock will also be provided at the beginning of the chapter to clarify its meaning. After presenting cultural information best described as "general", Chapter 2 will then

proceed to discuss more specific concepts of the three East Asian countries, suggesting the possibility that their cultural features may cause culture shock in Western business workers. As the last section of the theoretical part, Chapter 3 will introduce a model of cross-cultural competence to explore the conditions needed to acquire intercultural skills.

The relevance of the theoretical information will be confirmed or contradicted thanks to the practical part. Three online questionnaires (one for each country investigated) will be created and aimed at Western expatriates working in East Asia. Furthermore, one interview will be conducted with a Belgian businessman, Dr Terry Lidarssi, who is used to doing business in East Asia. The collected pragmatic data will ultimately indicate the real impact of certain specific East Asian concepts in the workplaces of Western businesspeople, their likelihood of triggering culture shock in Western workers, as well as more insight into additional factors of culture shock in East Asian business. Furthermore, the frequency and the variety of cross-cultural training among business workers will be investigated.

At the end of the dissertation, the objective is to be able to answer the following research questions:

- *To what extent do Western businesspeople experience culture shock in the East Asian workplace? What are common factors of culture shock experienced by Western businesspeople in the East Asian workplace?*

- *What are the strategies that can be implemented in order to help these workers deal with culture shock?*

Theoretical part

CHAPTER 1: Key concepts of intercultural communication

In order to investigate the extent to which Western people might experience culture shock in the East Asian workplace, several key concepts of intercultural communication will be introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. Over the last decades, many specialists in the field have carried out research and formulated theories and frameworks that emphasise the cultural characteristics of various nations. Some of the differences observed are likely to lead to cultural conflicts, which underlines the need to discuss those theories in my dissertation. Before diving into some of those frameworks, the notions of "culture" and "culture shock" should be clearly defined to avoid any potential confusion.

1.1. Definitions of *culture* and *culture shock*

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary[1], *culture shock* is defined as "a sense of confusion and uncertainty, sometimes with feelings of anxiety, that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation". This definition highlights the uneasiness that one could feel when confronted with a different culture, but unlike most definitions of "culture shock" that can be found in dictionaries, it implies that a lack of preparation may trigger this phenomenon. This suggestion is particularly valuable for my second research question and will be discussed more thoroughly in the final sections of the theoretical part.

Culture shock thus occurs when one is exposed to an "alien culture or environment", but what does the word "culture" refer to exactly? In 1945, the American anthropologist Ralph Linton wrote in *The Cultural Background of Personality* that culture is a "configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component parts are shared and transmitted by members of a particular society" (p. 32). The aspects of *transmission* and *community* emphasised in this sentence are also present in the definition offered by Cecil Helman, a medical anthropologist that looked for cultural factors in health, and who claimed the following (2017, pp. 282):

> *A culture is a set of guidelines [both explicit and implicit] which individuals inherit as members of a particular society, and which tells them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods, and to the natural environment*

[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/

These two definitions highlight two key elements to the concept of culture: firstly, culture is learned in a group, and secondly, culture determines the way we behave and perceive the world.

1.2. Frameworks of intercultural communication

This section is dedicated to two authors that brought tremendous progress to the field of intercultural communication: Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede.

Globally acknowledged as the founder of the field of interculturality (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999), Edward T. Hall has contributed greatly to the research on cultural differences. In 1959, Hall wrote a book called *The Silent Language* in which he introduced the notions of high-context and low-context cultures, bringing to the world two main cultural patterns that are supposedly discordant with one another. His framework was further developed in some of his later books, such as *Beyond Culture* (1976) or *Understanding cultural differences: Germans, French and Americans* (1990), and has since been widely used by the scientific community to compare cultures.

Geert Hofstede also contributed a great deal to the intercultural field. In 1980, the Dutch psychologist created the Cultural Dimensions Theory, another important framework that analyses cultures by classifying them into different categories. His theory originally comprised four dimensions named as follows: *Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, and Masculinity versus Femininity*. A fifth dimension called "Long-term versus short-term orientation" was added in the 1980s (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). According to Hofstede and Bond (1988), this dimension resulted from a study that was conducted among students in 23 countries worldwide, and which circulated questionnaires that had been designed by Chinese scholars.

1.2.1. High-context and Low-context cultures

In *Understanding Cultural Differences* (1990), Edward T. Hall and Mildred R. Hall explain that context is "the information that surrounds an event and that is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event" (p. 6). The two authors further state that the elements that can produce this meaning are linked to some extent to one's culture, and that this culture can be compared to others thanks to a scale ranging from high to low context.

Following Hall's theory, Beamer and Varner (2008) assert that people who are part of ***high-context*** cultures convey the meaning of a message thanks to the context, which can be their actual physical environment of communication or an internalised social context. The communication is thus mostly implicit, and the messages can be elliptical, indirect, or allusive. By contrast, cultures that rely on words and convey an explicit message are characterised as ***low-context***. Since people belonging to this type of culture are not used to looking out for implicit cues in conversation, they would tend to think that the context of communication is not sufficient to understand the message effectively or they may misunderstand the message altogether.

* **Data about Westerners and East Asians**

In 1990, Hall & Hall classified the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Japanese as part of high-context cultures, while Americans were described as low-context individuals. This information was used by Rösch and Segler, who produced a "summary" graph in 1987 (cf. Figure 1).

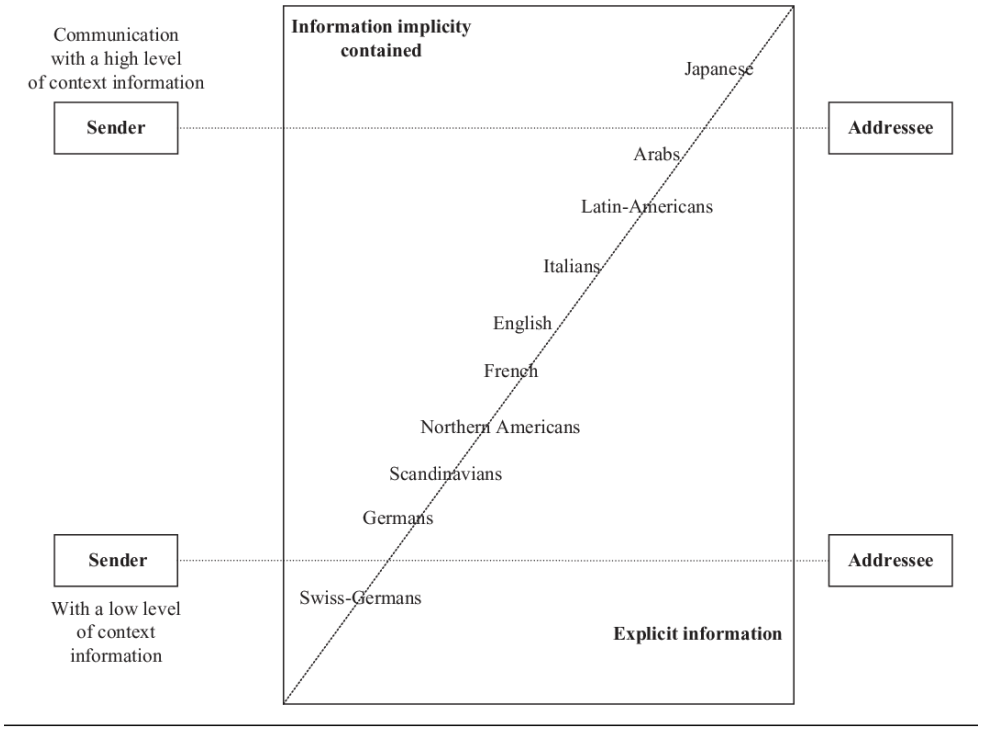


Figure 1: *High context and low context cultures.* Source: Rösch and Segler (1987, p. 60)

Across the scale, it can be observed that the Japanese hold the highest position, making them a perfect representative of a high-context culture. Northern Americans, on the other hand, were situated in the lower part of the graph, reinforcing their belonging to a low-context culture. It should however be noted that their position on the scale is much closer to the centre than to

the one of the Swiss-Germans, for example, and that Northern Americans are thus better defined as "medium/low-context culture" representatives. The Chinese and Koreans were not included in the graph, but many authors have argued that they belong to high-context cultures over the last decades. For instance, an article written by Nowak & Dong (1997) mentions that the Chinese present a more subtle and indirect behaviour (p. 177). The Koreans are assumed to follow a similar pattern, as a statement from Song (2017) stresses that they are expected to "understand the unclear and even unexpressed information in speech" (p. 103).

1.2.2. Cultural Dimensions Theory

1.2.2.1. Power distance

Power distance corresponds to the first dimension of Geert Hofstede's framework. In *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (1981), the psychologist indicates that *Power distance* is related to "the different solutions to the basic problems of human equality" (p. 29). The author Maureen Guirdham explains more clearly this dimension in her book *Communicating across cultures at work*, dating from 2005. Following Hofstede's theory, she writes that *Power distance* corresponds to the degree of separation between people of various social status. Societies with a high degree of power distance often present a rigid system of vertical hierarchies and formal relations between people of different ranks, while societies with a low degree of power distance favour open and informal relations, as well as companies with a flat hierarchy.

* **Data about Westerners and East Asians**

Using Hofstede's research data, it can be observed that the United States obtains a score of 40 on the Power distance scale, which strengthens its position as an egalitarian society. Conversely, the three East Asian countries tend to have a high degree of power distance: Japan, China, and South Korea present a score of 54, 80, and 60 respectively on Hofstede's power distance index scale (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Based on these results, Japan and South Korea could be considered slightly hierarchical societies, while China is unquestionably one of the most stratified countries in the world (Country Comparison, 2021[2]).

[2] https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/

1.2.2.2. Individualism/Collectivism

The second dimension in Hofstede's Theory concerns the degree of individualism and collectivism in society. Making use of Wiseman's definition in *Intercultural Communication Theory* (1995), it can be stated that "individualistic" nations include cultures in which the goals of individuals are considered more important than the ones of the group, while the exact opposite can be said for members of "collectivistic" communities: the group's objectives largely surpass personal ambitions.

- **Data about Westerners and East Asians**

According to Hofstede's data, China and South Korea hold very low scores of 20 and 18 on the Individualism scale, characterising them as collective societies. Nowak & Dong (1997) confirm these results and assert that the Chinese are part of a collectivistic culture, which can be illustrated by their tendency to live together in the same house and by their group-oriented attitude in the workplace. By contrast, they point out that Americans belong to the more independent and individualistic category; possessing a culture that emphasises their needs for dignity, rights, individual achievements, and freedom. The United States obtains a score of 91 on Hofstede's Individualism scale, which strengthens its position as one of the most individualist cultures in the world. Neither highly collective nor individual, Japan presents a medium score of 46 on Hofstede's individualism index scale.

1.2.2.3. Masculinity versus Femininity

The third dimension of the Cultural Dimensions Theory is linked to the role of gender in society. In 2001, Hofstede stated that people in masculine cultures are supposed to be "assertive, tough and focused on the material success", while feminine cultures need to be "more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life" (p.297). Deng (2015) adds that masculine societies differentiate between the roles of men and women: men are a symbol of strength and determination, very often dedicating themselves to their career and to increasing their salary, while women are oriented towards family life, overall embodying an image of gentleness.

- **Data about Westerners and East Asians**

In *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2005), Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede assert that Japan has a strong masculine culture. This statement is confirmed by the results of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. Standing at a very high score of 95,

Japan corresponds to one of the most masculine societies in the world, which translates into severe competition between their groups, intense workaholism, and determination to reach excellence in many different aspects of life (Country Comparison, 2021). At respectively 66 and 62, China and the United States also demonstrate typical masculine cultures in which success takes centre stage. Conversely, South Korea presents a more feminine culture with a score as low as 39 on the Masculine/Feminine scale. South Koreans can thus be assumed to favour consensus, solidarity, and the overall well-being of the population.

1.2.2.4. Anxiety/Uncertainty management

The fourth dimension of Hofstede's theory is named Anxiety management, Uncertainty management, or Uncertainty Avoidance. According to the author himself (2005), this aspect relates to a culture's level of tolerance with anxiety/uncertainty, which indicates that the more individuals avoid uncertainty, the more rules and standards will be imposed in society. Guirdham (2005) further specifies that uncertainty-avoiding cultures tend to close organisations to outsiders, to stress obedience, and to punish non-conformity. By contrast, societies with a low Uncertainty Avoidance accept "outsiders at all levels, stress personal choice, and decision-making" (p. 51). Furthermore, they usually reward innovative ideas, cooperation, and risk-taking.

- **Data about Westerners and East Asians.**

According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), Japan and South Korea present a high level of uncertainty avoidance, which can be supported by their respective scores on the UA scale: 92 and 85. The critical need to have rules, punctuality, and security is particularly present in these two countries, which could potentially act as a barrier to innovation (Country Comparison, 2021). Japan's location on the map could partly explain its high degree of uncertainty avoidance: as the island is frequently threatened by typhoons, tsunamis, and other natural disasters, it is crucial that they be prepared for any uncertain situation. Unlike its East Asian neighbour, China obtains a low score of 30 on the UA scale, showing an open and tolerant attitude towards uncertainty (Deng, 2015). Americans present a medium score of 46 in this fourth dimension: fear of uncertainty is present in society, probably even more after the tragic events of 9/11, but Americans are overall tolerant towards new ideas and innovative products (Country Comparison, 2021).

1.2.2.5. Long-term/Short-term orientation

As stated by Chevrier (2003), a long-term orientation corresponds to ideas of "perseverance, categorisation of relationships according to status, economy, as well as a sense of shame" (p. 55). By contrast, a short-term orientation puts emphasis on "stability and constancy, saving face in all circumstances, traditions and other social obligations, such as the reciprocity of greetings, favours and other gifts".

* **Data about Westerners and East Asians**

Hofstede and Bond (1988) argue that the Confucian dynamism present in China, Japan, and South Korea is more oriented towards the future, as this belief system presents values of perseverance and thrift. The three countries' long-term orientation is further emphasised by their scores on the fifth dimension's scale: 100 for South Korea, 88 for Japan and 87 for China. The United States has, in contrast, a short-term orientation culture, as evidenced by its low score in Hofstede's long-term orientation index values (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

The four countries' scores in the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can be observed side by side in a comparative graph from the website *Hofstede Insights* (cf. Figure 2):

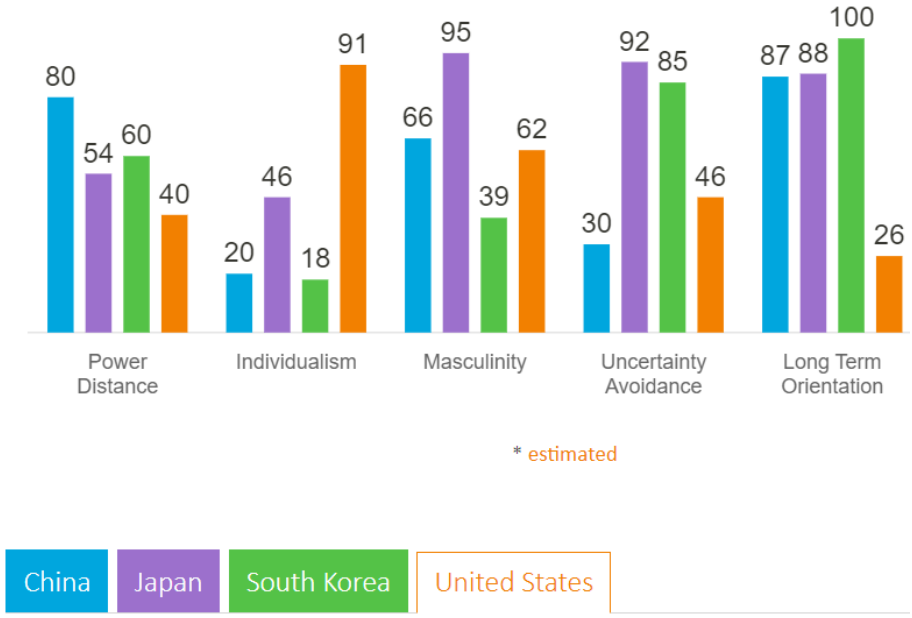


Figure 2: *Comparative graph showing the results of China, Japan, South Korea and the United States in Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions.* Source : Hofstede Insights. Country Comparison (2021). https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/china,japan,south-korea,the-usa/

1.3. Discussion

The first chapter of this dissertation has allowed me to identify several key concepts of intercultural communication that could potentially trigger culture shock in a Western businessperson working in East Asia. Keeping Hall and Hofstede's theories in mind, miscommunications between high-context Westerners and low-context East Asians could easily occur. Similarly, it was observed that Western and East Asian cultures are often opposed to each other when it comes to their values: Americans are typically individualist, short-term oriented and big supporters of equality. By contrast, East Asians tend to be more collective, possess future-oriented values, and highly respect their social ladder.

All this information highlights features of East Asian cultures that could be characterised as "general" and serve as a first overview of the problems that may arise from interactions between East Asians and Westerners. Nevertheless, it should be stated that Westerners working in an East Asian workplace could come across conflictual situations that derive from more specific cultural aspects. Most of those "specific" aspects relate to concepts or processes that are unique to East Asian cultures and are usually assumed to be known by everyone within Chinese, Japanese or South Korean society. As these concepts and processes rarely expand outside of East Asian countries, foreigners are often unaware of their existence, and this knowledge is made even harder to grasp due to a lack of satisfactory English translations. Even when a translation is provided, the latter is usually literary and not understandable without a clear explanation. The new chapter of this dissertation focuses on those specific cultural aspects.

CHAPTER 2: Specific cultural aspects of East Asian countries

In this second chapter, a series of specific cultural aspects from China, Japan and South Korea will be presented. These aspects are all related in some way or another to the business world, and they were selected on the basis of their assumed influence in the East Asian workplace. This influence was determined by their frequency among scientific articles, as well as more personal knowledge related to East Asian societies. This chapter will be separated into three parts named after the East Asian countries studied in the dissertation. Specific cultural aspects of China will be discussed first, followed by those of Japan and South Korea.

2.1. China

2.1.1. Guanxi (关系)

The Chinese word "guanxi" can be translated as "connections" or "relations" in English. According to Pye (1992) and Chen (2004), it relates to the concept of building relationships through a continual exchange of favours rather than through sympathy and friendship. Consequently, the relationship is often perceived as more utilitarian than emotional, which explains the ultimate loss of face if the return of a favour is not observed, or if conformism to other expected rules of conduct is not performed. It is interesting to note that this *guanxi* network tends to benefit the weaker side more in the case of a relationship between two people of unequal ranks (Alston, 1989). Thanks to the Confucian principle of "family cohesion", it is fine for the weaker side to expect more help from the powerful side than what he/she can reciprocate.

As pointed out by Kao (1993) and Zhao (2000), *guanxi* is a factor of paramount importance to conduct successful business negotiations with the Chinese, as all Chinese family businesses are considerably dependent on their *guanxi* network to get business opportunities. Chinese businesspeople develop their relationships with their partners thanks to dinners, gifts, and friendly experiences. Once they have acquired a good relationship with their partner or client, they can begin negotiations through formal dinners and lunches (Nowak & Dong, 1997). Kao (1993) adds that throughout the process, it is important that the Chinese businessperson honours his/her obligations, remains loyal and exchanges favours.

2.1.2. Notion of face (面子/脸)

2.1.2.1. Definitions

"A person needs face like a tree needs bark"[3] is a Chinese saying that demonstrates the importance of face in Chinese society (Ho, 1976). According to Brown & Levinson (1987), face is a person's "public self-image" (p. 311), while Ting-Toomey & Kurigi (1998) add that the concept is linked to notions of respect, honour, reputation, and credibility. In business, more specifically, Brunner & Wang (1988) believe that face is a Chinese businessperson's most precious possession.

According to Ming-Chung Yu (2003), the Chinese concept of face has two components: "mianzi" (面子) and "lian" (脸). *Mianzi* is an "individual's desire to achieve public recognition of one's reputation or prestige" (p. 1696), while *lian* refers to "the respect of the group for a man with a good moral standard" (Hu, 1944, p. 45). In other words, possessing *mianzi* depends on whether one's dignity is recognised by the community, whereas *lian* is only acquired if the individual behaves in accordance with the socially sanctioned rules or requirements (Shi, 2011). Hu stated in 1944 that losing *lian* is much more tragic than losing *mianzi*, as one cannot function properly within the community without it. The loss of *mianzi*, by contrast, means that one's reputation or dignity is not honoured as expected (Cheng, 1986).

2.1.2.2. Cultural background

According to Chang & Holt (1991), the importance of face comes from the significant influence of Confucianism in Chinese society, as this system of ethics encourages the Chinese to value face for moral reasons. Shi (2011) claims that maintaining *lian* in the very collectivist Chinese society implies that one is supposed to "act in accordance with external expectations, rather than from internal wishes" (p. 27). In a situation in which a person violates the socially expected norms, that same person is likely to lose *lian* and be condemned by the group for his/her behaviour, which might even affect the reputation of the people close to him/her (Hu, 1944). Shi adds that once *lian* is lost, it is very difficult for an individual to regain respect and social integrity in the group. The threat of such severe punishment thus encourages many Chinese to "regulate their social behaviour" and to abide by the "socially endorsed requirements of conduct" (Yu, 2003, p. 1685).

[3] « 人要脸, 树要皮 »

2.1.2.3. Characteristics of face

While the concept of face in the Western part of the world is rarely mentioned outside of academic and research contexts, *mianzi* and *lian* are omnipresent in Chinese society and are part of the population's everyday life. As a personal fan of Chinese TV shows and dramas, I have repeatedly witnessed situations explicitly mentioning these two notions. From this experience of mine, protecting one's honour appears to be one of the Chinese's top priorities, and it is common for people who feel disrespected to utter the following words as a way to convey their dissatisfaction: "给我一个面子吧!", literally translated as "give me a face !". The common usage of the concept could explain why the Chinese face is much more complex than its Western counterpart and encompasses several characteristics.

- **Face can be measured**

It is possible to keep track of how much face each member of a social network has. According to Hu (1994), the Chinese usually know if a certain person in society has a lot of face (面子大), not much face (面子小), no face (没面子), or more face than others (他的面子比较大). A lot of face usually equals to having a high status in the group, while not much to no face is associated with a low status (Jia, 2001b).

- **Face can be altered**

Face is not a fixed concept. According to Cardon & Scott (2003), face can be gained (增加面子) or lost over time (丢面子). In a business setting, face can be obtained by "maintaining and expanding high-profile business relationships, developing well-known business brands, and procuring favourable business deals" (p. 12). As difficult as it may be, it is nonetheless possible to regain face or to return it to previous levels (换回面子).

- **Face can be exchanged**

Hu (1944) states that face can be traded and is related to the ideas of "borrowing face" (借面子) or "buying face" (买面子). If an individual does not have enough face, he/she has the right to ask for help from someone with a lot of face, who will then intervene on his/her behalf for a specific purpose. Though this might look like a selfless act of kindness, it should be stated

that the Chinese keep track of such favours and will expect reciprocity at some point (Jia, 2001b).

- **Face is mutual**

"Dajia you mianzi" (大家有面子) relates to the idea that everyone has face, which means that if one member of the group loses face, it puts the rest of the group's face at risk (Jia, 2001b). All the members are thus expected to give face to one another (互相给面子), as it will by extension influence their own level of face.

- **Face is influenced by others**

The amount of face is linked to how someone gets treated by others (Hu, 1944). Jia (2001b) claims that the Chinese often talk about "protecting face" (保护面子), "saving face" (留面子), or "avoiding losing face" (丢面子). Face can also be rewarded (伤面子) or given by others (给面子). In a business context, Chinese workers are expected to be able to both give and save face for others, as these skills are important to build credibility and trust among business partners (Cardon, 2003).

2.1.2.4. Strategies to save or give face

As shown in the previous sections, the concept of *face* is a crucial part of the Chinese's life, and it is also extremely important to business communication, which justifies the need to possess skills related to saving and giving face (Redding & Ng, 1982). According to Hwang (1987) and Seligman (1989), losing face in business can result from face-losing actions such as demonstrating public displays of anger, directly refusing requests, behaving aggressively and arrogantly or not treating the status of others appropriately. By contrast, typical face-giving behaviours include praising, giving gifts, and making concessions (Brunner & Wang, 1988; Seligman, 1989). The most common strategies to save or give face will be presented in the following lines.

- **Being indirect**

The Chinese usually avoid public confrontation to save face. Nevertheless, when the latter is not possible, they will most likely use indirect communication to preserve the face of others as well as their own (Cardon & Scott, 2003). Gao (1998) argues that rejecting a request

in a direct way is often seen as a face-losing act in Chinese society, and Chinese businesspeople will thus favour statements carrying a more implicit message, such as "it might be inconvenient" (不方便) or "there are some difficulties" (有些困难) when a person wants to decline a request. This style of communication is very typical of a high-context culture, as the content of the message is not explicitly stated, and that other elements such as non-verbal attitude must be considered to effectively understand what the person means.

- **Using intermediaries**

Cardon & Scott (2003) affirm that the use of intermediaries can also be very useful to avoid potential face loss, as it bypasses direct confrontation. Intermediaries are most often respected members of the disputants' social networks with a lot of face, and they generally conduct business and manage relationships unofficially, although they may occasionally be official mediators for larger conflict issues (Jia, 2001a; Ma, 1992).

- **Praising**

The habit of praising counterparts is often used by Chinese businesspeople to give face. Praising is considered a recognition of someone's status, position, or managerial competence, and it is usually practised in the presence of peers and subordinates. This strategy is especially popular in banquets, which are typical events where one can develop the relationship with business partners (Brunner & Wang, 1988; Cardon & Scott, 2003).

2.1.3. Jun-zi orientation

Jun-zi（君子) *orientation* is yet another important Confucian concept that influences Chinese business practices. According to Tian, Tse & Powpaka (2020), *Jun-zi orientation* represents Confucius's "ideal image of a holy man with moral integrity", which include five main values: "ren" (仁) (benevolence/humaneness), "yi" (義) (appropriateness/righteousness), "li" (禮) (propriety/harmonious differentiation), "zhi" (智) (wisdom/knowledge management), and "xin" (信) (integrity/trustworthiness) (p. 397).

Following the three authors' definition, a "Jun-zi" is a person who behaves in accordance with these five virtues, while a Junzi-oriented firm refers to a firm that "adopts the virtues of a *Jun-zi* as the guiding principles of business" (p. 397). More specifically, the Jun-zi *concept* is a "philosophical principle that forms the core values and culture of a business" (p.

397), while the Jun-zi *orientation concept* is the "actual implementation of the Jun-zi concept" (pp. 397-398).

2.1.3.1. Benevolence/humaneness (ren)

"Ren" is one of the five main values of Jun-zi orientation, which originally relates to "the appropriate attitude and behaviour of treating another person" (p. 398), thus involving a sense of benevolence and concern for the well-being of humanity (Cua, 2007). The character is formed by the components "people" (人) and "two" (二), which shows that a "ren" relationship needs at least two people to be developed (Duan, 1937).

Tian, Tse & Powpaka (2020) claim that following the dimension of *ren* in business means that a company will seek to satisfy the interests of its stakeholders and be kind to them. One could argue that the promotional approach of management also puts emphasis on the stakeholders' satisfaction, and thus that it is not very different from the *ren* dimension. On this matter, it should be stated that "non-Chinese" companies usually satisfy their stakeholders with the ulterior motive to maximise sales and profits, while a *ren*-company endeavours to meet the needs of their stakeholders with a genuine concern for their well-being. Overall, a *ren*-organisation treats its stakeholders as part of its family, and not as components that can be replaced to maximise profit.

If we turn to ancient Chinese philosophy, "ren" used to be considered a fundamental element to build and govern a state, which can be illustrated by Mencius's quote in Li Lou 1.1 (372–289 BC): "if a government fails to exercise ren, one could not secure the tranquil order of a kingdom". Tian et al. (2020) affirm that this idea of maintaining order is also present in a business context, as *ren* is crucial to building and sustaining a good reputation and corporate image.

2.1.3.2. Appropriateness/righteousness (yi)

Yi indicates appropriate or righteous behaviour (Tian, Tse & Powpaka, 2020). Duan (1937) further specifies that this principle relates to the appropriateness of both one's behaviour and appearance, which is generally seen as a sign of beauty. If we break down the character "義", we can see that it is formed by the components "self" (我) and "sheep" (羊). In old China, sheep were dear to people and the component "sheep" (羊) was even used to create the character

for “beauty” (美), essentially explaining its presence in the “yi” character (Tian, Tse & Powpaka, 2020).

Following this dimension, Tian et al. (2020) claim that a *Jun-zi* firm favours morality and righteousness over profit, even at the cost of its own survival. Regarding the belief that a voracious firm that only cares about profit and treats its stakeholders as tools will eventually cause its own demise, a *Jun-zi* oriented company will always righteously pursue profit while avoiding activities that could harm its stakeholders and living environment.

2.1.3.3. Propriety/Harmonious differentiation (li)

Using Tian, Tse & Powpaka’s definition (2020), *li* can be considered a tool to “constrain human behaviour within the defined boundaries of proper conduct” (p. 402).

Following the words of Xunzi (310 – 230 BC), human nature is bad and can only bring chaos and anarchy if it is not controlled. There is therefore a need to implement rules and social order into society while also taking into consideration humans’ natural instincts and desires. The balance between satisfying desires and presenting a rightful conduct can be achieved through the application of *li* in one’s personal life (Tian, Tse & Powpaka, 2020). *Li* works as a self-restraint concept that helps people of different statuses to perform their duties in a socially accepted way. The main goal of *li* is to ensure harmony which, according to Confucius, is achieved through the practice of the rules of *li* (Analects 1.12).

One can maintain harmony in business by finding one’s most suitable position and doing one’s best in it while considering everyone’s interests (Tian et al., 2020). Satisfying customers’ needs is obviously very important, but the *li* dimension also puts emphasis on perceiving competitors as potential partners, as these future collaborators could bring great products and services to everyone in the market thanks to product differentiation and creative product development. The three authors further state that “if different firms in the same industry can compete in different dimensions for different segments of customers, both firms and consumers can be benefited by the competition” (p. 403). The essence of *li* thus lies in finding a compromise that will allow all parties concerned to reach a win-win resolution.

2.1.3.4. Wisdom/knowledge management (Zhi)

Zhi corresponds to a form of wisdom linked to the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong (Tian, Tse & Powpaka, 2020). By extension, it is related to what should or should not be approved in society. Thompson (2007) argues that a person possessing this skill pays extra care to his/her own words, as it is fundamental that the person adapts his/her verbal message and fashions the most fitting responses to the complexity of a situation. The character "智" itself is a faithful representation of this idea: it is formed by the components "arrow" (矢), "say" (日), and "mouth" (口), the first two of which correspond to things that are believed to be impossible to chase back in Western philosophy, namely "a shot arrow" and "spoken words" (Proverbs, 12-22, 17, 19). The character of *zhi* can therefore be viewed as a metaphor that constantly reminds people to think carefully before saying something out loud (Tian, Tse & Powpaka, 2020).

In a more concrete business setting, Lee and Dawes (2005) consider that a company with wisdom knows that acting ethically will most likely bring about short-term losses. Nevertheless, these losses will eventually contribute to good relationships and long-term reputation. As a *Jun-zi* organisation includes a long-term orientation, it presents a need to predict future market trends by apprehending the market situation and looking carefully for changes in market movements. Future planning is crucial, and short-term profit is often sacrificed for the sake of future development. In this manner, the authors affirm that the Chinese typically invest heavily in building relationships with their partners to reach long-term well-being.

2.1.3.5. Integrity/trustworthy (xin)

Xin (信) carries the meaning of trustworthiness (Lu, 2001). As Tian, Tse & Powpaka (2020) point out, it is made up of the components "people" (人) and "word" (言), which implies a person-word relation.

Lu (2001) argues that this dimension gives rise to trustfulness and faithfulness by "speaking one's mind-heart" and "living up to one's words". A *xin* person can therefore easily be entrusted with responsibilities, but he/she should never promise something that he/she cannot achieve, as a failure could lead to the person's disgrace and to the loss of one's reputation (Confucius, Analects 17.6 and 13.20).

The same idea is present in a business environment. Tian et al. (2020) believe that a Jun-zi orientation company "should be careful with what it promises, and once a promise has been made, should strive its best to make it happen" (pp. 408-409). A good reputation can only be obtained through sincere words and careful actions, which will in turn allow the company to gain the trust and faith of its customers and stakeholders (Mayer et al., 1995). As Ge claims in *Trustworthiness is a kind of social resource* (2003), *xin* is considered a major social resource, and the lack of it is bound to threaten the long-term survival of a company.

2.1.4. Negotiating strategies of the Chinese

In an article called "The Chinese Approach to International Business Negotiation", Zhao (2000) discusses one of his research studies in which he examined several negotiation textbooks typically used by Chinese business students in their training programs. This research aimed to find the Chinese approach to international business negotiation and to bring findings that could eventually indicate the most appropriate strategies for foreigners to do business in China. For his study, Zhao selected 14 business negotiation books that were written by Chinese authors and published in the People's Republic of China between 1988 and 1998. Furthermore, he conducted interviews with publishers and trainers, which allowed him to designate those fourteen books as "widely adopted textbooks for international business negotiation" (p. 214). The information that he found in those texts allowed him to highlight four popular strategies of the Chinese negotiator: win-win, win-lose, cooperative egoism and concessive negotiation.

- ***The win-win strategy***

The first strategy is called the *win-win* strategy and represents an opportunity for the different parties to "work together cooperatively to adjust their individual needs and to expand their mutual benefits, thereby creating a win-win outcome" (p. 217). Out of the fourteen books Zhao has analysed, half of them recommended this strategy for international business negotiations, as its features echo some of the principles of China's foreign trade and economic cooperation: equality, mutual understanding, mutual trust and benefit, and long-term cooperation.

- ***The win-lose strategy***

The second most popular strategy is the *win-lose* strategy, which relates to the Chinese saying: "the marketplace is a battlefield" (商场如战场) (p. 217). Considered as famous as the

win-win strategy, the win-lose strategy emphasises the assumption that doing business is like going to war, and that the tougher you are, the more you will get from your opponent. Nevertheless, this strategy is heavily disapproved of by the Chinese population, as the people practising the win-lose strategy are quickly labelled as "unscrupulous merchants" or "profiteers" and are often described with words such as "deceiving", "lying", or "extremely selfish". Win-lose negotiators might win at first, but they are bound to deal with legal battles or even to lose clients forever. For this reason, the win-lose strategy is not recommended for international business.

- ***Cooperative egoism***

The third strategy can be seen as a mix of the win-win and the win-lose strategies. According to Zhao (2000), *cooperative egoism* implies that negotiators cooperate, but that they only do so to get what they cannot get elsewhere. Following this principle, the cooperative egoist will negotiate competitively, and eventually reach a win-win result in which he/she gains more than his/her counterpart. This strategy can be associated with the Chinese saying, "there is no businessman who does not rip off customers" (无商不奸) (p. 219), and is also recommended for international business, even though some win-win advocators are strongly opposed to it and claim that cooperative egoism will prevent the two parties from creating a long-term harmonious relationship.

- ***Concessive negotiation***

The last strategy relates to the idea that reaching an agreement is more important than sticking to one's personal benefits, and that negotiators should make concessions if their basic interests are satisfied (Zhao, 2000). This is a form of "friendly" negotiation in which trust and concessions are expected from both parties, and which can easily foster unhappy feelings and a sense of exploitation if these conditions are not met. The values conveyed through this type of negotiation are those of "harmony, stability and respect for tradition" (p. 219) and are more specifically defined as past- and present-oriented values by Hofstede & Bond (1988). Because of the threat of manipulation that this strategy presents, concession negotiation is usually not recommended for international business, unless the negotiators already have very good business relationships.

2.2. Japan

2.2.1. Haragei (腹芸)

According to Matsumoto (1988), the key to success when conducting business with the Japanese is to understand the concept of "haragei" (腹芸).

"Haragei" can be literally translated as the "art" of the stomach; a "visceral" communication that relates to expressing oneself without words or gestures, and which appears to completely defy the traditional Western logic. In the book *16 ways to avoid saying no* (1981), Imai argues that the Japanese must be able to read between the lines, as "what is left unsaid is just as important as what is said" (p. 1). This aspect of Japanese society can easily become a source of problems for Western partners, as they might not grasp the information that the Japanese are conveying through non-verbal communication, and that their own words or actions are likely to be misinterpreted as deliberately offensive (Norbury & Bownas, 1980). This "art of the stomach" could partly explain why the Japanese typically consider the behaviour of Western businesspeople as too loud and might have inspired Krisher (1981) to state that "the foreigner talks twice as loud as his actual intention and the Japanese twice as soft as his feeling" (p. 23).

2.2.2. The concept of Harmony (和)

As pointed out in the *Cultural Dimensions Theory*, the Japanese belong to a widely collectivistic society, which implies that business exchanges are also affected by their group-oriented behaviours (Rösch & Segler, 1987). Harmony corresponds to one of the concepts that are essential to ensure the proper functioning of the group and may be considered both as an "ever-present background" and a "guiding principle".

In Japanese mentality, general agreement within the group is far more important than individual considerations. As Norbury & Bownas claimed in 1980, this belief typically discourages Japanese businesspeople from presenting ideas of their own too often, unless they know for certain that they can count on the group's support. It will also make the Japanese more cautious when asked for their opinion in an official meeting setting. As a blunt opinion is assumed to lead more easily to a conflictual situation, the Japanese typically avoid giving "yes or no" points of view; a lack of verbal debate that can be traced back to Japan's samurai era.

According to Jack Seward (1983), Japan used to have a very highly structured society in which the *samurai* held considerable power over the rest of the community and enjoyed a series of privileges, such as the right to chop off one person's head if the latter had offended his honour. This practice was known as "Kiri sute gomen" (斬り捨て御免), which can be translated literally as "I'm sorry to have cut and left your body [but it was my right]". Faced with the risk of being slaughtered by the *samurai*, Norbury & Bownas (1980) believe that the community developed a very cautious form of verbal response, which engendered the tendency to use indirectness as a way to escape the cruel sentence that a wrong answer could foster.

Maintaining harmony also affects the way Japanese businesspeople reach a decision. "A nail standing out will be hammered down"[4] is a Japanese saying that illustrates well the importance of Harmony, as it clearly indicates that one's conduct should always be in line with the group's expectations. Whereas it is not rare to observe a strong confrontation caused by diverging opinions in Western negotiations, the Japanese put emphasis on cooperation and consensus to avoid such situations. Rösch & Segler (1987) state that confrontation is seen as "irreconcilable" with the principle of Harmony and will ultimately only trigger a "bad feeling" (p. 57). That being said, and as much as the Japanese strive to maintain harmony in their group, they do occasionally encounter some sort of conflict. The difference with Western practices is the way they deal with them, or more accurately speaking, the way they *do not* deal with them: while Westerners might want to solve the problems by confronting them, the Japanese typically avoid bringing out diverging opinions, or they do so when it is too late; a behaviour that represents a source of frustration for many foreign executives (Norbury & Bownas, 1980).

2.2.3. Tatemae and Honne (建前と本音)

It was previously argued that the Japanese rely heavily on nonverbal communication to convey a message, but it should also be stated that their behaviour is not always perfectly representative of their true feelings, as can be seen in the practice of *tatemae*.

In Japan, *tatemae* (建前) corresponds to the "public façade" (literally translated as "constructed façade") and arose from the idea that the group needs to adapt itself to its external environment (Taka, 1994). Following this principle, the Japanese adjust themselves to the group's needs and accept changes that are necessary for the survival of the group. Unlike

[4] « 出る釘は打たれる »

tatemae, the concept of *honne* (本音) relates to a person's real intention or real motive. By refusing to perform *tatemae*, the person asserts his/her desire to express himself/herself in a free way without being hindered by the requirements of the group. Since the Japanese put emphasis on harmonious relations within the group, a conflict between *tatemae* and *honne* is rarely observed: either the leader changes his/her expectations towards the subordinates, or the subordinates put aside their self-interests for the sake of the group. In any case, the final decision-maker will not clearly stress whose assertion was adopted; a feature that highlights Japan's consensual decision-making.

2.2.4. Decision-making in Japanese Business

As stated by Hite & Hawes (1991), decisions in Japanese business are consensus-based, which means that they need to be approved and coordinated by all the people involved before they can be implemented. Since everyone in the group must be consulted before making the decision, the process usually takes a long time, but it also means that the implementation is achieved very quickly by the Japanese. One of the most popular decision-making processes in Japan is called "Ringi Seido".

2.2.4.1. Ringi Seido (稟議制度)

Following Sagi's definition (2015), Ringi Seido (稟議制度) is a "traditional way of managerial decision-making" in Japan (p. 10). The Japanese word "Seido" (制度) can be translated as "system" or "institution", while "Ringi" can be separated into two parts: the term "Rin" (稟), which relates to the submitting of a proposal to a supervisor (also including the latter's approval to it), and the other part "Gi" (議), conveying the meaning of "deliberations" or "decisions".

Sagi states that the Ringi system comprises four stages: proposal, circulation, approval, and record. A proposal typically circulates among various departments and sections of the company and requires the approval of every member that could be affected by it. Such a long process also suggests a lot of informal meetings in which ideas and plans are discussed by employees; an activity more specifically known as "Nemawashi" (根回し).

2.2.4.2. *Nemawashi* (根回し)

With the aim to reach a consensus-based decision, *Nemawashi* represents an essential part of the Ringi system. According to Saito (1982), the expression literally means « turning the roots », and was originally a professional term used by the « Uekiya » (植木屋); an expert on trees. Before transplanting a tree, an Uekiya had to cut the fine roots around the main root, as well as smoothing its ends into a round shape. The tree was then left alone for one or two years, a lapse of time during which new fine roots sprouted and contributed to reinforcing the main root. As a result, the tree was more resilient and could easily adapt to a new environment.

According to Japanese mentality, the same goes for humans: a person too can adjust himself/herself to new environments, provided that the latter is sufficiently prepared. In a more specific business context, Saito (1982) argues that the expression « nemawashi » gives the idea that relationships between members of a group must be « rounded out » in order to reach a collective decision, which is achieved through careful personal interactions. It is thus no wonder that the Japanese have the habit of going out for a drink with their colleagues after work. This precious time is typically used to develop empathic interactions with one another and to exchange gifts (a practice known as *Oseibo* or *Ochugen* depending on the time of the year), ultimately laying the groundwork for successful and collective decisions.

Yamamoto (1977) further specifies that *Nemawashi* is greatly dependent on *Kuuki* (空気), another Japanese term that relates to the “human atmosphere” or “vibrations” present in a situation (pp. 12-13). As *Kuuki* controls and directs people towards a certain direction, it is the task of *Nemawashi* to make sure that the proper *Kuuki* has been created before the beginning of negotiations. The development of a good human atmosphere will help to round out relationships between members of the group, which will in turn be a paramount factor for successful decision-making.

The Reigi system is inherent in Japanese Business culture but tends to be more problematic in international business, where decision-making procedures vary from one culture to another. According to Sagi (2015), Reigi Seido has received some criticism in the past for its slow and time-consuming process. That being said, its participative management and collective approach to decision-making is generally appreciated.

2.2.5. The Japanese network

In a similar way to Chinese *guanxi*, the Japanese also put emphasis on the development of the relationship with their partners before conducting business negotiations with them. Norbury & Bownas (1980) indicate that they generally start by collecting information about the individuals or the companies that they intend to collaborate with, and that they most importantly pay attention to their connection with other individuals, companies, or institutes. Once the Japanese businesspeople have spent enough time together, the principle of "giri" (義理) will be fundamental to ensure the longevity of the relationship. *Giri* is "an individual's obligation to repay a favour" (Hite & Hawes, 1991, p. 34). For example, a seller is expected to repay a "debt" after a buyer has purchased his/her product in Japanese marketing. A client is also expected to reciprocate in some way after he/she has received small gifts or entertainment from the seller. Occasionally, one might attend parties or gatherings to keep in touch with the people one knows and to preserve harmonious relationships within one's social network (Saito, 1982).

2.3. South Korea

2.3.1. Kibun (기분)

According to Chaney & Martin (2011), the term "*Kibun*" relates to a "mood or feeling of balance and good behaviour", which considerably influences the way South Koreans do business. Lee (2012) points out that people in South Korea strive to maintain a stable *Kibun* both in their personal life and in the business environment, which also implies caring about others' *Kibun*.

This concept is very much in line with the notions of Chinese *guanxi* and Japanese *harmony* previously discussed in this work, as it takes into consideration other people's opinions and feelings to maintain its balance. In this perspective, features of indirect communication, such as avoiding saying "no" or sharing bad news, are used to preserve each other's *Kibun*. In a business context, more specifically, Korean people always try to remain polite, friendly, and to accomplish things with the best intention. Since a manager's *Kibun* can be damaged by a lack of respect from his/her subordinates, the latter will typically avoid such conduct. It goes the same way for the manager, as public criticism on his/her part could easily harm a subordinate's *Kibun*, leading to a potential loss of *chemyon* (the translation of "face" in Korean). Song, Hale & Rao (2004) argue that foreign negotiators should be aware of the

existence of *Kibun*, as neglecting it is likely to cause miscommunication between the different parties, whether the act was deliberate or not. Koreans are emotional people, and they can easily withdraw from negotiations if they feel that their *Kibun* has been damaged.

As was discussed in the parts about specific cultural aspects of China and Japan, maintaining harmony in East Asia often implies that one will have to rely heavily on nonverbal language cues to understand the real meaning behind an ambiguous answer. With the existence of the culture of *Kibun*, Lee (2012) affirms that Koreans can easily be assimilated to a similar high-context group, whose rules and practices might once again clash with Americans' direct approach to business.

2.3.2. Nunchi (눈치)

A very specific component of South Korean body language is called *Nunchi* (눈치), which is translated as "eye measure" (Robertson, 2019). *Nunchi* corresponds to the ability of understanding the implication of a message by looking at subtle cues given by the body of the person. According to Choi and Choi (1992), the concept of *Nunchi* has two features: one is that *Nunchi* is oriented towards "indirect communicative exchanges", and the other argues that *Nunchi* interactions require both "figuring out" the elements of an indirect communication and "executing" acts of such communication (p. 51).

Nunchi includes two meanings that have different connotations. In its most positive sense, *Nunchi* is seen as an expert skill that can "steer social situations" thanks to the subtle cues of information that the *Nunchi* master gathers from people's body language. In this case, Robertson (2019) evokes a "skilled *Nunchi*", which includes various levels: a "lack" of Nunchi, "slow Nunchi" and "quick Nunchi". Koreans that lack Nunchi usually miss "fairly obvious social cues" (p. 104) and because of that, might become unintentionally rude towards others. A slightly better level of Nunchi is called "slow Nunchi", which is seen in people that sometimes fail to grasp information that they themselves deem as clear social cues. The last level, "quick Nunchi", relates to people that easily pick up on subtle social cues and use them to maintain harmony within the group.

In a more negative view, mastering the Nunchi skill can occasionally be frowned upon by the community, as people with "too much" *Nunchi* might use their abilities to manipulate

their peers for selfish reasons, appearing as "overly strategic" and "morally vicious". Furthermore, Robertson (2019) talks about another sense of the concept, the "Burdened Nunchi", which is particularly unfavourable to Koreans with less power in social hierarchies. Compared to individuals with high social standing, people of lower status are typically expected to pay much more attention to their *Nunchi* for the sake of the *Kibun* and social harmony of the group. This common assumption puts a lot of pressure on the younger members' shoulders, most of whom are women, and can be described as both "exhausting and frustrating", as it heavily restricts their words and acts. This Korean practice might foster *dabdabhae* (답답해); a feeling of physical suffocation brought by an inability to express oneself freely due to external circumstances.

2.3.3. Inhwa (인화)

Inhwa is literally translated as "harmony", which constitutes another key principle of the South Korean business culture (Lee, 2012). Like China and Japan, South Korea shares the same Confucian roots that emphasise the importance of harmony between people. A harmonious environment is paramount to the good functioning of society, and it implies that people be careful with their acts and words. In order to maintain harmony, Korean businesspeople make sure that every party in a deal is happy, they avoid giving negative answers or direct refusals, and most importantly, they show respect to their superiors.

Echoing Hofstede's results for South Korea on the Power Distance Index, Lee (2012) argues that Koreans need to respect parents and other authority figures, such as rulers, elders, leaders, and those with a high rank in hierarchy. In business, workers must obey their employers' and supervisors' orders and expect to get satisfaction from them. Nevertheless, it does not mean that their efforts to preserve the relationship are one-sided, as was discussed in the previous part about *Kibun*: both parties have the responsibility to maintain harmony by protecting each other's face.

2.3.4. The Korean network

In line with China and Japan's ways of doing business, Korean workers place great importance on building personal relationships that could bring them some reliable long-term partners (Lee, 2012). Achieving this goal takes time and suggests that several meetings will have to be held during the process, as each member of the Korean party must be consulted

before a final decision can be announced. It also means that the foreign company will have to be patient and to avoid rushing things to gain the trust of Korean businesspeople.

Alston (1989) indicates that South Korea is particularly known to have a "clan management style" in which members of the same family work together. This system of clans started more than 2,000 years ago and is still present nowadays in the country, although its number has increased over time: 39 "root" clans are said to exist currently in South Korea, compared to the dozen of them that controlled the peninsula in Ancient History (Mente, B. D., 2011). Among all the families, the Kims and the Lees are the two most influential ones, as their large number of members has allowed them to dominate many aspects of society, such as the economy, politics, and education. Just as place of birth plays a role in a job interview, South Koreans' clan affiliation also represents an important element in employment, and foreign employers in the country should always be aware that making members of different clans work together could generate friction.

Keeping the very collective aspect of Korean society in mind, Lee (2012) argues that it can be useful for a foreign company to be introduced by a mutual friend or by an acquaintance. This kind of "help" represents a good start for a solid and long-lasting business relationship, but it should not give the wrong impression that everything is already granted: the foreign company will have to continuously contact the Korean company to maintain this relationship of trust.

2.4. Discussion

This second chapter has allowed me to consider a series of specific cultural aspects of China, Japan and South Korea that could potentially trigger culture shock in the East Asian workplace.

Overall, it can be argued that the ideology of Confucianism still has a considerable influence in these three countries, as it has impacted their values, concepts, and business practices. *Guanxi* in China is unquestionably founded upon the Confucian doctrine that relationships need a continual and mutual exchange of favours, which indicates a long-lasting approach to business. Japan and South Korea present similar networks, as developing a relationship with their partners is seen as a mandatory step for future successful cooperation. The emphasis on harmony is another major influence of Confucianism in these three countries, which brings about a great deal of specific cultural concepts needed to maintain this precious balance, such as *face, haragei* or *kibun*. From the theories that were explored in this chapter, it can be stated quite confidently that many strategies can be used to maintain harmony in China, Japan, and South Korea. Nevertheless, as they often operate through non-verbal communication and require special attention to cultural-related subtleties, they might not be obvious at first sight for low-context Western workers, which is very much bound to cause misunderstandings at some point. Similarly, the values fostered by Confucianism have influenced East Asian business practices and created traditional processes, such as *Jun-zi orientation* in China or *Ringi Seido* in Japan. The ideas of harmony and consensus that are transmitted in these procedures do not appear fundamentally problematic, but the amount of time that they imply and the need to hear everyone's opinion before taking a decision might be bothersome to the typical short-time oriented individualistic Americans.

CHAPTER 3: Research on cross-cultural competence

This chapter briefly discusses cross-cultural competence to address my second research question. At the very beginning of this dissertation, the concept of culture shock was described following a definition from the Merriam Webster Dictionary, which highlighted the "lack of adequate preparation" as a cause of culture shock. Since cross-cultural competence usually consists of professional training, the hypothesis that cross-cultural competence can be considered as a strategy to deal with culture shock will be formulated in the framework of this third chapter.

3.1. The importance of cross-cultural training

In the business world, it is not rare to hear about stories of expatriates or negotiators that failed to reach a deal following a misunderstanding or cultural *faux pas*. In 1977, Steward highlighted a lack of proper cultural training among expatriates. At that time, cultural training was not automatically provided, and when it was, it often involved learning lists of dos and don'ts rather than concrete programs which would give useful information to adapt to a new culture. Waltman stated in 1987 that prospective business travellers were prepared for the most basic functions and that this training was far from efficient to make them cope with a new environment. Students of business communication only learned greetings, how to apologise and how to deal with money and postal problems. Around forty years later, the situation remains unsatisfactory. In 2020, Smallwood claimed that students of business communication do not receive consistent cross-cultural training in their courses. The cross-cultural competence material does not hold a central position in their classes, which leaves students "underprepared for the professional workplace" (Smallwood, 2020, p. 134). Over time, many authors have emphasised the paramount importance of proper cross-cultural training for international businesspeople and have published books and/or articles to introduce several models.

The focus of this chapter is on cross-cultural competence, a skill that is assumed to improve one's intercultural communication and thus reduce the impact of culture shock. As many theories of cross-cultural competence exist, I chose to discuss Johnson et al.'s model from an article called *Cross-Cultural Competence in International Business: Toward a Definition and a Model (2006)*. This selection was made on the basis that this model integrates knowledge from other renowned authors in the field of interculturality, such as Geert Hofstede and Bruce

Kogut, and therefore arguably forms the most "comprehensive" framework that I came across in my research.

3.2. Definition

According to James P. Johnson et al. (2006, p. 530), cross-cultural competence in business is defined as follows:

> *Cross-cultural competence in international business is an individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad.*

This definition suggests that cross-cultural competence is not innate, as some skills and knowledge are needed for it to develop. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note Johnson et al.'s suggestion that personal attributes might play a role in the acquisition of the competence. The implications of their model will be further discussed in the following sections.

3.3. James P. Johnson et al.'s model

In 2006, James P. Johnson, Tomasz Lenartowicz and Salvador Apud developed a model of cross-cultural competence in international business by incorporating theories and knowledge from other researchers in the field. Their model emphasises several elements that affect the development of cross-cultural competence in one way or another.

3.3.1. Culture knowledge

Johnson et al. argue that culture knowledge is needed to develop cross-cultural competence. According to Hofstede (2001), it is made up of culture-general knowledge and culture-specific knowledge.

Cultural-general knowledge corresponds to being aware of cultural differences. It is generally included in the material that one learns in internal business courses and includes material on the components of culture, the way cultural values are learned, or even the different frameworks that are used to understand and compare cultures. Additionally, it comprises the awareness of various economic, political, legal, social, financial, and technological systems that operate side-by-side in international business. Cultural-specific knowledge, on the other hand, focuses on more specific cultural information, such as a country's geography, economics,

politics, law, history, customs, as well as the famous "dos and don'ts". In certain cases, it might involve learning the language connected with a particular culture.

In 1993, Bird et al. introduced three types of culture-specific knowledge: factual, conceptual, and attributional. Factual knowledge and conceptual knowledge are characterised as "explicit" and easily assessable. The first relates to information about the country's history, its political and economic systems, as well as its social structure, while the second is all about grasping the value system of a cultural group and understanding how these values are reflected in the group's behaviour. By contrast, attributional knowledge is more informal and personal (Polanyi, 1958). Reinforced by factual and conceptual knowledge, it is the ability to correctly attribute one person's behaviour to a particular culture, and thus act accordingly when meeting that person. This knowledge usually requires frequent exposure to other cultures in order to develop.

3.3.2. Personal skills

Personal skills are another element present in Johnson et al.'s model. As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a skill is "a learned power of doing something competently: a developed aptitude or ability". In the specific context of international business and the development of cross-cultural competence, it includes a list of abilities and aptitudes that range from speaking a foreign language to stress management and conflict resolution (Johnson et al., 2006). Skills are usually learned over a long period of time.

3.3.3. Personal attributes

In addition to personal skills, Johnson et al. extend their cross-cultural competence model by mentioning Bass's 1990 study, which considers that personality traits have an impact on the acquisition of management and leadership skills. According to Bass, learning these skills might be easier and more effective if the person demonstrates some of the following traits: ambition, courage, curiosity, decisiveness, enthusiasm, fortitude, integrity, judgment, loyalty, perseverance, self-efficacy, and tolerance for ambiguity. In line with Bass's theory, Johnson et al. also mention Leila O'Sullivan's research (1999) on personality traits and back up her perspective that not all employees are "equally trainable" (p. 532), as some people might lack traits that are essential to learn special knowledge and skills.

3.3.4. Institutional ethnocentrism

Institutional ethnocentrism is another part of Johnson et al.'s model, which is in fact presented as detrimental to the development of cross-cultural competence. According to Hofstede (2001), ethnocentrism in multinational business corporations corresponds to the practice of imposing on affiliates abroad the ways of working used at the headquarters in the home culture, even when it is not appropriate (p. 441). Since developing cultural competence in a diverse workplace requires "strong institutional support" (Cross et al, 1989), favouring the home country's practices in a multicultural firm can represent an obstacle to the development of said competence.

3.3.5. Cultural distance

In addition to institutional ethnocentrism, Johnson et al. argue that cultural distance is another element that can prevent the development of cross-cultural competence. Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Kogut and Sigh (1988) define cultural distance as the overall difference in national culture between the home country and affiliates overseas. A large cultural distance can be identified from different cultural values, a different language and economy, as well as different political and legal systems. The more this distance increases, the more difficulties affiliate overseas are likely to face, and the tougher it will be for them to respond appropriately to cultural differences in their workplace (Johnson et al., 2006).

Figure 3 provides a visual summary of Johnson et al.'s model.

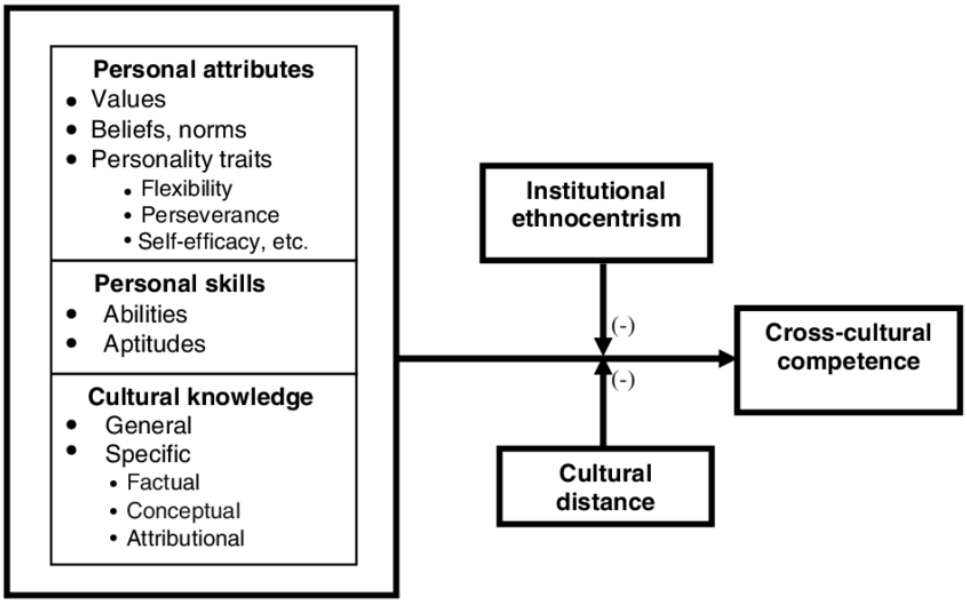


Figure 3: *A model of cross-cultural competence in international business.* Source : Johnson, Lenartowicz & Apud (2006, p. 533)

Practical part

CHAPTER 4: Data and method

By gathering pragmatic data, the objective of the practical part is to answer the two research questions that were presented in the introduction of the dissertation:

1. To what extent do Western businesspeople experience culture shock in the East Asian workplace? What are common factors of culture shock experienced by Western businesspeople in the East Asian workplace?

2. What are the strategies that can be implemented in order to help these workers deal with culture shock?

Overall, the data were collected by means of online questionnaires as well as a personal interview carried out with Dr Terry Lidarssi, the CEO of a Belgian cosmetic company, whose position has brought him a wealth of experience in relation to business negotiations with East Asian workers. Further information linked to the methods used and the profiles of the survey participants are provided in the following sections.

4.1. Data

4.1.1. Online questionnaires

A total of three questionnaires were created on the platform Google Forms. They were aimed at Western expatriates working in China, Japan, or South Korea. Since the term "Western" can be quite confusing and take on different meanings, the people targeted in these questionnaires were selected from the following definition of the Cambridge Dictionary[5]: "[a Westerner is] a person who comes from a country in the Western part of the world, especially North America or Western Europe". It is important to note that Australia and New Zealand are also considered "Western", even though they are geographically discordant with the concept (Shvili, 2021). Figure 4 from the website World Atlas[6] highlights the parts of the world that are nowadays considered to be Western.

[5] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/
[6] https://www.worldatlas.com/

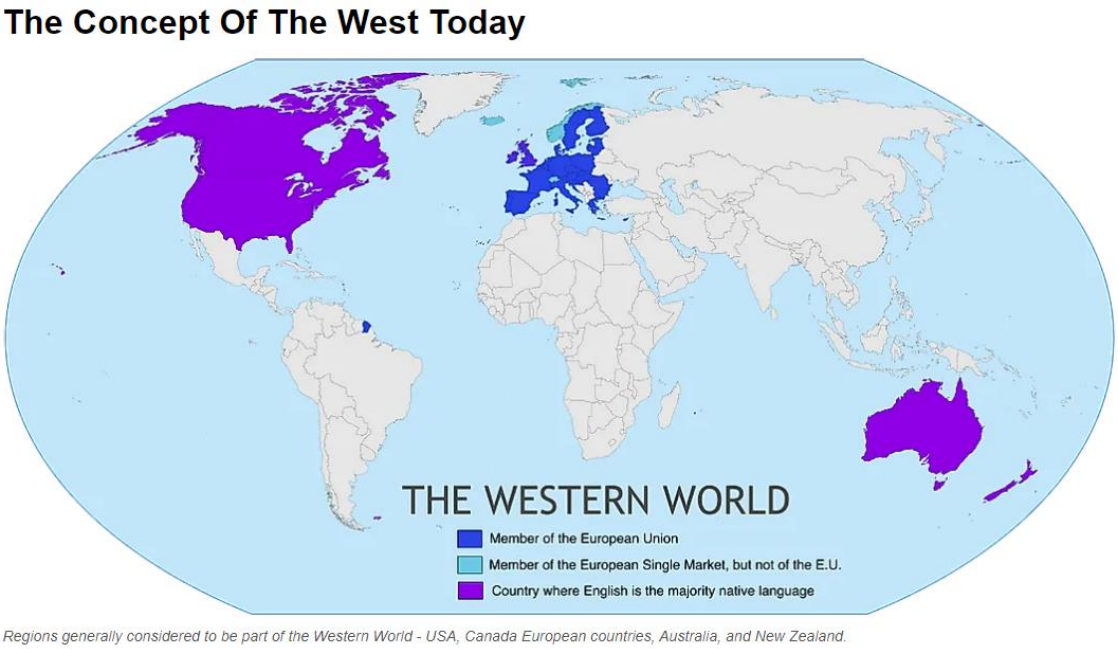


Figure 4: *Regions typically considered to be Western.* Source: Shvili, 2021.

The questionnaires were then distributed on various social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. On Facebook, the surveys were shared on about forty groups dedicated to expatriates and immigrants working in China, Japan, or South Korea. After a couple of days, the search scope was extended, and the questionnaires were also shared on more general groups related to living in one of the three East Asian countries. The full list of Facebook groups can be found in Appendix 2. The data were collected over three to seven weeks.

4.1.1.1. Profile of the participants

- ***China***

The questionnaire on China was answered by a total of 19 respondents. Most of the participants come from the United States (6), France (4), Sweden (2), Germany (2) and Canada (2). As can be observed in Figure 5 below, other Western respondents originate from Italy (1), Australia (1) and Belgium (1).

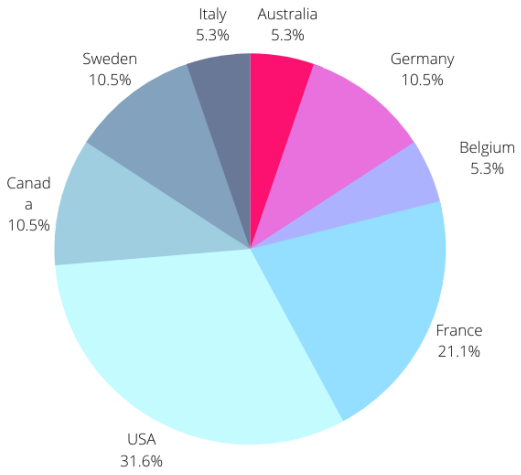
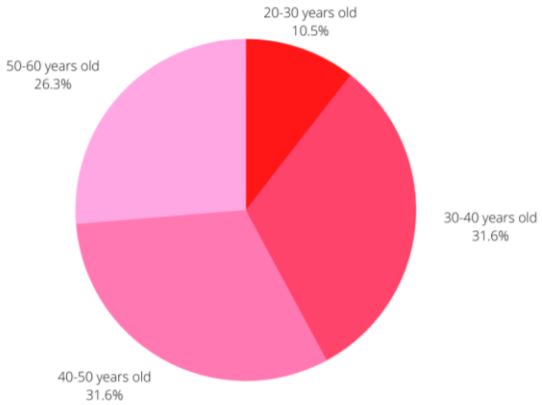


Figure 5: *Country of origin of the participants*

In terms of age group, the participants range from 20 to 60 years old, most of them being in their thirties or forties at the moment of the survey (cf. Figure 6). As for their gender, there is an overwhelming number of male respondents (73.7%) in comparison to female respondents (21.1%). Only one person in the group preferred not to give any gender-related information (cf. Figure 7).

Figure 6: *Age group of the participants*



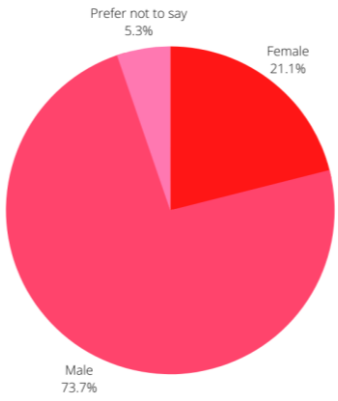


Figure 7: *Gender of the respondents*

Information related to their work activity was also collected. The data show that 2 respondents have been working in China for less than a year, 5 have spent between 1 to 5 years there, 7 have been working in the country from 5 to 10 years and 5 have accumulated more than 10 years of work experience in China (cf. Figure 8). These data suggest that most of the respondents are well acquainted with Chinese business culture and can therefore answer the questions knowledgeably by using their experience as a reference point.

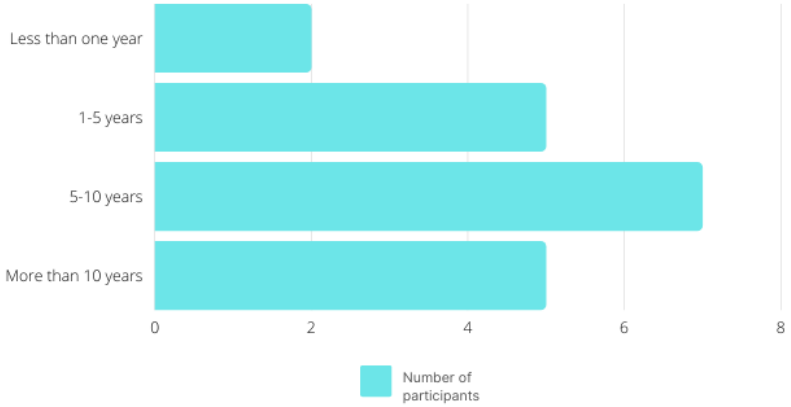


Figure 8: *Years spent working in China*

Besides the time spent working in China, the business field and work position of the participants were also asked. The results show that these two elements vary quite drastically, as the total number of business fields amounts to ten. It can nevertheless be observed that most of the respondents are working as managers in China (cf. Table 1). The business fields with the most participants are Management (6) and International Business (3), Education (2) and Technology (2).

BUSINESS FIELD	**POSITION**
FINANCE (1)	Manager (1)
MANAGEMENT (6)	CFO (1)
	Curriculum evaluation and implementation (1)
	Regional Manager (1)
	Business Controller (1)
	Manager (1)
	Program Director (1)
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS (3)	Regional Manager (1)
	Owner (1)
	Consultant (1)
EDUCATION (2)	Teacher (2)
TECHNOLOGY (2)	Consultant (1)
	Project Manager (1)
INDUSTRY (1)	General Manager (1)
LOGISTICS (1)	Country Manager (1)
HOSPITALITY (1)	General Manager (1)
ENGINEERING (1)	Project Manager (1)
TRANSPORTATION (1)	CEO (1)

Table 1: *Business fields and job positions of the participants*

In the last demographic question, the participants were asked about their Chinese language skills. The data reveal that most of the participants can speak Chinese at a more or less good level: 8 respondents are beginners in the language, representing 42.1% of the participants, while 7 can speak Chinese at an intermediate/advanced level (36.8%). By contrast, only a minority of 4 respondents cannot speak Chinese at all (21.1%) (cf. Figure 9). Based on this information, it could be assumed that most of the participants will be familiar with the concepts mentioned in the survey, as these present very strong ties with the Chinese language and culture.

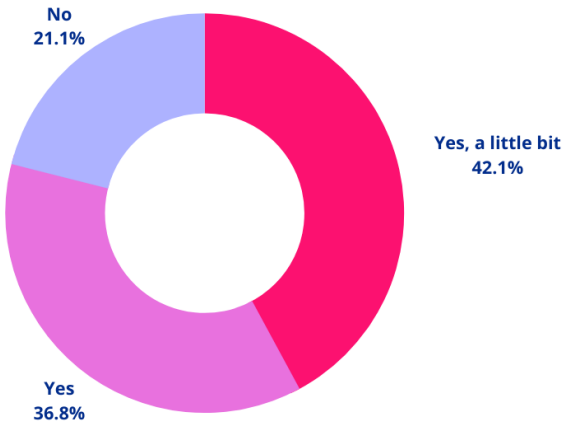


Figure 9: *Answers to the question « Can you speak Chinese ? » in the first questionnaire*

These demographic questions are useful to develop a profile of the average respondent. The latter should correspond to a male Westerner (most likely American or French) between the ages of 30 and 40, with a few years of professional business experience in China and at least a basic understanding of the Chinese language.

* ***Japan***

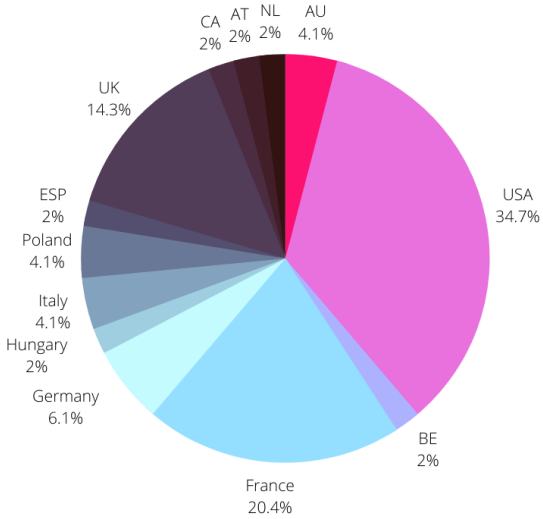


Figure 10: *Country of origin of the participants*

In comparison to the questionnaire aimed at Western business expatriates in China, the Japanese version was much more popular and gathered a total of 49 respondents from many different Western regions of the world. Once again, participants from the USA (34.7%) and France (20.4%) are the most frequent, followed by people from the UK (14.3%) and Germany (6.1%). Other participants come from Poland (4.1%), Italy (4,1%), Australia (4.1%), Hungary (2%), Spain (2%), Belgium (2%), Canada (2%), Austria (2%) and the Netherlands (2%) (cf. Figure 10).

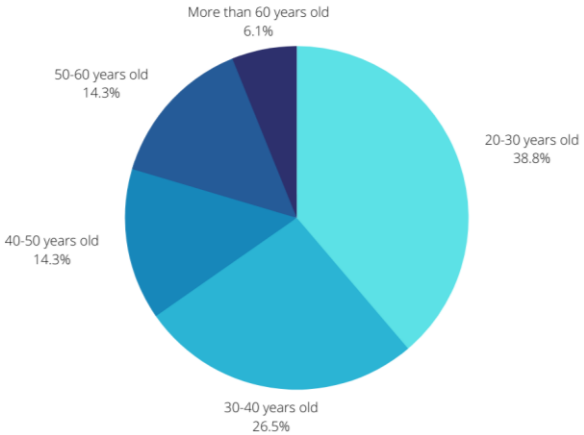


Figure 11 : *Age group of the participants*

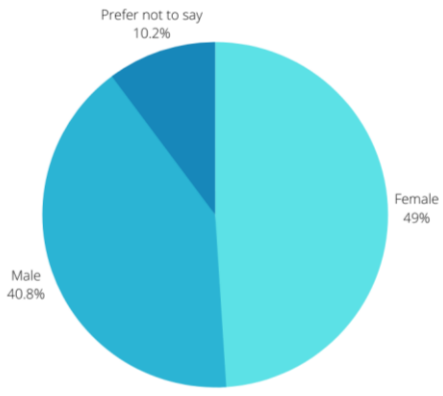


Figure 12 : *Gender of the participants*

As for the average age of the participants, many of them belong to the 20-30 age group (38.8%), followed by those in the 30-40 age group (26.5%). 7 people are respectively found in the 40-50 and 50-60 age groups. Finally, only 3 participants (6.1%) are over 60 years old (cf. Figure 11). In comparison to the Chinese version of the questionnaire, the gender of the respondents varies. 24 participants are women (49%) while 20 others are men (40.8%). Out of

the 49 respondents, 5 (10.2%) prefer not to reveal information about their gender (cf. Figure 12).

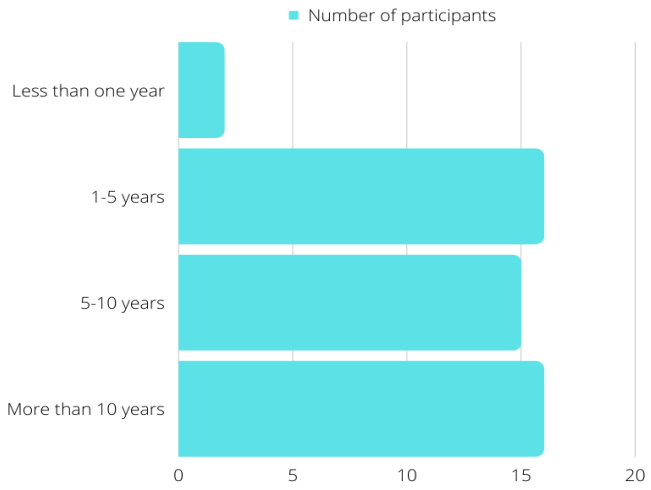


Figure 13: *Years spent working in Japan*

As can be observed in Figure 13, most of the participants have already spent some time working in Japan. Out of the 49 respondents, 16 participants (32.7%) have been working in Japan for 1 to 5 years, while the same number of people have accumulated more than 10 years of working experience in the country. 15 participants (30.6%) have been working for 5 to 10 years in Japan, and only 2 people (4.1%) declare that they have been working in Japan for less than a year. Overall, this means that a big majority of the respondents are well accustomed to Japan's business workplace and can use their experience to answer the questions.

BUSINESS FIELD	**POSITION**
ACCOUNTING (1)	Manager (1)
MANAGEMENT (1)	Operations Manager (1)
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS (7)	Director (2) Manager (1) Interpreter/translator (1) Employee (2) Currently unemployed but has previous experience in the field (1)
EDUCATION (9)	Teacher/professor (4) Assistant (1) Instructor (1) Employee (1)

	Associate professor (1)
	Freelance teacher (1)
FINANCE (2)	Trainer and Editor (1)
	Broker (1)
SALES (3)	Customer service/shipping (1)
	Global Account Manager (1)
	Vice President (1)
FOOD BUSINESS (2)	Pastry maker (1)
	Manager (1)
CONSTRUCTION (1)	Architect (1)
AGRICULTURE (1)	Employee (1)
TECHNOLOGY (5)	Manager (1)
	Software engineer (1)
	Senior Manager (2)
	Engineer (1)
MARKETING (4)	Social Media Manager (1)
	Project Manager (1)
	Employee (1)
	Researcher (1)
REAL ESTATE (1)	Consultant (1)
TRANSPORTATION (1)	Director (1)
PUBLISHING/WRITING (3)	Head writer (1)
	Proofreader (1)
	Owner (1)
TOURISM (1)	Self-employed (1)
TRANSLATION (2)	In-house Translator (1)
	Contract Worker (1)
ENTERTAINMENT (2)	Creative Director (1)
	Audio Engineer (1)
PRIVATE BUSINESS (1)	Company President (1)
CONSULTANCY (1)	Employee (1)
MANUFACTURING (1)	Global Business Administration Group and International Business Group Staff (1)

Table 2: *Business fields and job positions of the participants*

As much more people participated in the Japanese version of the questionnaire, a bigger number of business fields and job positions can be displayed. The participants are split into a total of 20 business fields, the most popular ones being International Business (7 participants),

Education (9 participants), Technology (5 participants) and Marketing (4 participants). The job positions are equally varied: as in the Chinese version of the questionnaire, many of the participants are working as managers (10 participants). Teachers are also very common (around 6 participants), as well as those who simply write "employees" as their job position (6 participants).

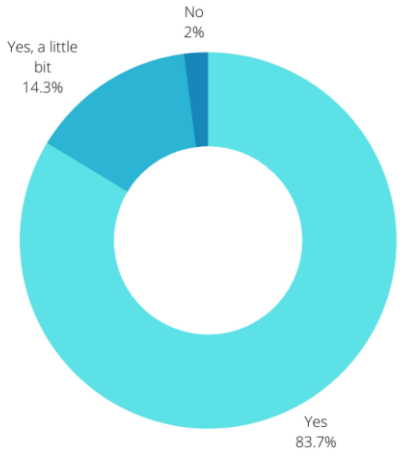


Figure 14: *Answers to the question « Can you speak Japanese ? » in the second questionnaire*

Interestingly, a big majority of the respondents can speak Japanese at an intermediate or advanced level (83,7%). 7 participants (14,3%) can speak Japanese at a beginner level, while only 1 person (2%) admits that he/she cannot speak the language at all. Unlike the first questionnaire on China, this means that much more people in this survey can understand the language of the country and thus potentially be familiar with the concepts of the survey.

The data collected from these demographic questions reveal that the average respondent is a female Westerner in her 20s or 30s with at least a few years of work experience in Japan and a good command of Japanese.

* ***South Korea***

Although the questionnaire on South Korea was shared on many Facebook groups dedicated to expatriates in the country, it was unquestionably the least popular of the three surveys, gathering up a total of 11 respondents. Most of these participants come from France (4) and Canada (3). The remaining 4 people are from Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (cf. Figure 15).

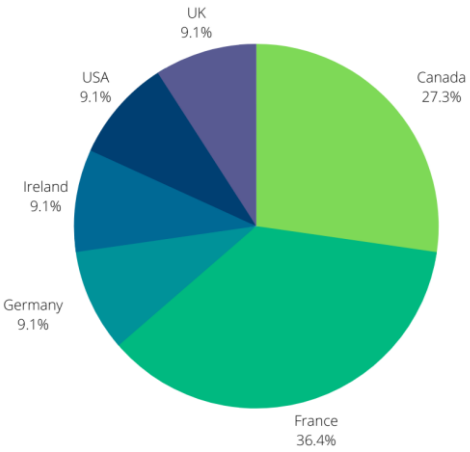


Figure 15: *Country of origin of the participants*

7 of the respondents identify themselves as male (63.6%), while 4 chose "female" as their gender (36.4%) (cf. Figure 17). As for the average age of the participants, most of them belong to the 30-40 age group (36.4%), followed by the 20-30, 40-50 and 50-60 age groups (18.2% for each of them). Finally, only one respondent (9.1%) is under 20 years of age, which means that he/she is also the youngest participant across the three questionnaires (cf. Figure 16).

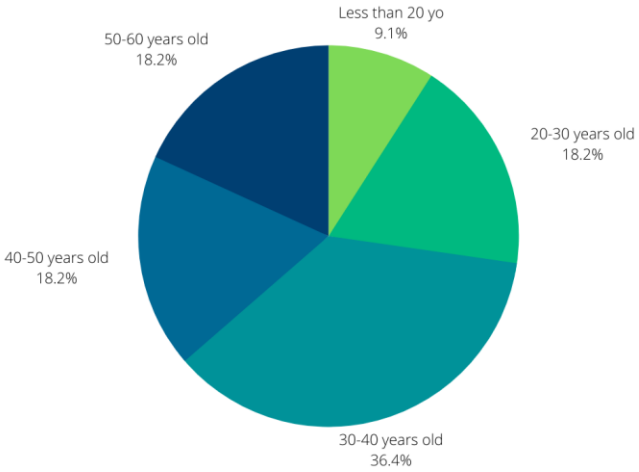


Figure 16 : *Age group of the participants*

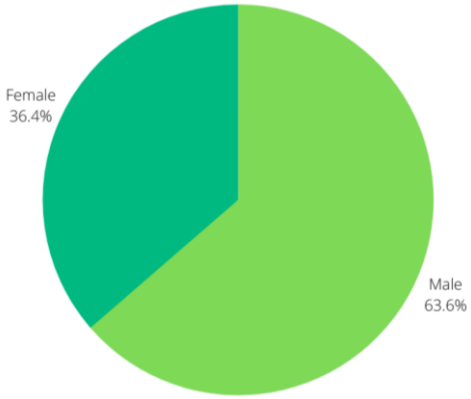


Figure 17 : *Gender of the participants*

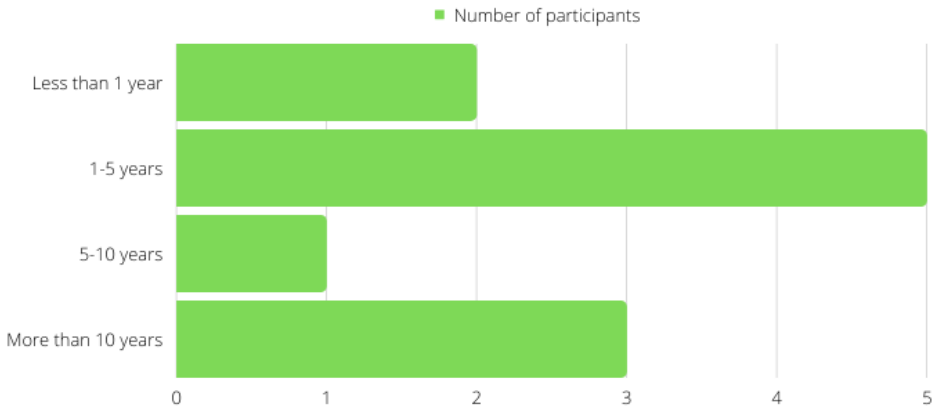


Figure 18: *Time spent in South Korea*

When it comes to the time spent in South Korea, the most frequently chosen option is 1 to 5 years (45.5%). "More than 10 years" is selected by 3 respondents (27.3%), while only one participant chose "5-10 years" (9.1%). The remaining 2 respondents have been working for less than a year in South Korea (18.2%). Echoing the first two surveys, these data indicate that the average participant does have at least a few years of work experience in the country and is thus likely to have heard about the concepts before.

BUSINESS FIELD	**POSITION**
MANAGEMENT (1)	Head of department (1)
EDUCATION (3)	Staff (1) Teacher (1) No longer employed but previous experience in the field (1)
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS (3)	"High" (1) International Trade Manager (1) Director/Manager (1)
FINANCE (1)	Manager (1)
MARKETING (1)	Intern (1)
RESEARCH (1)	Senior researcher (1)
IT (1)	Manager (1)

Table 3: *Business fields and job positions of the participants*

The most popular business fields among the participants are Education (3) and International Business (3). The other mentioned fields are Management (1), Finance (1), Marketing (1), Research (1) and Information Technology (1). The job positions are various, but it can be noted that the position of "Manager" is once again frequently mentioned.

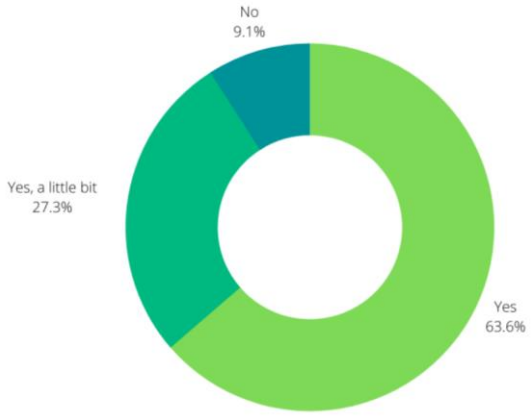


Figure 19: *Answers to the question « Do you speak Korean? »*

To the question « Do you speak Korean », most of the participants answer « yes, at an intermediate or advanced level" (63,6%). 3 participants (27,3%) declare that they are beginners in the language, while only one person (9,1%) admits to not being able to speak the language at all. As with the first two questionnaires, it can be suggested that the average participant will be familiar with most of the concepts thanks to his/her Korean language skills.

The data collected from these demographic questions reveal that the average participant is a male in his thirties who has spent at least a few years in South Korea and can speak Korean at an intermediate/advanced level.

4.1.3. Interview

In addition to the three online questionnaires, an interview was conducted in mid-December with Dr Terry Lidarssi, the CEO of Hauliga Laboratories (a Belgian cosmetics company), at the end of my three-month internship in the company. As Mr Lidarssi has a great deal of experience when it comes to negotiations in East Asia, he was the ideal candidate for an interview. This interview was conducted on December 20th 2021 through a call on Whatsapp, a popular application for business people to contact each other, and lasted a little over one hour. The data were thus collected orally before being transcribed.

4.2. Method

4.2.1. Online questionnaires

As mentioned above, each of the three questionnaires was designed on Google Forms, a platform which is very often used by students and researchers for enabling users to create questionnaires in a short amount of time. In order to distinguish better between the three surveys,

a different background colour was applied for each of them: blue for Japan, green for South Korea and purple for China (cf. Figure 20 below)

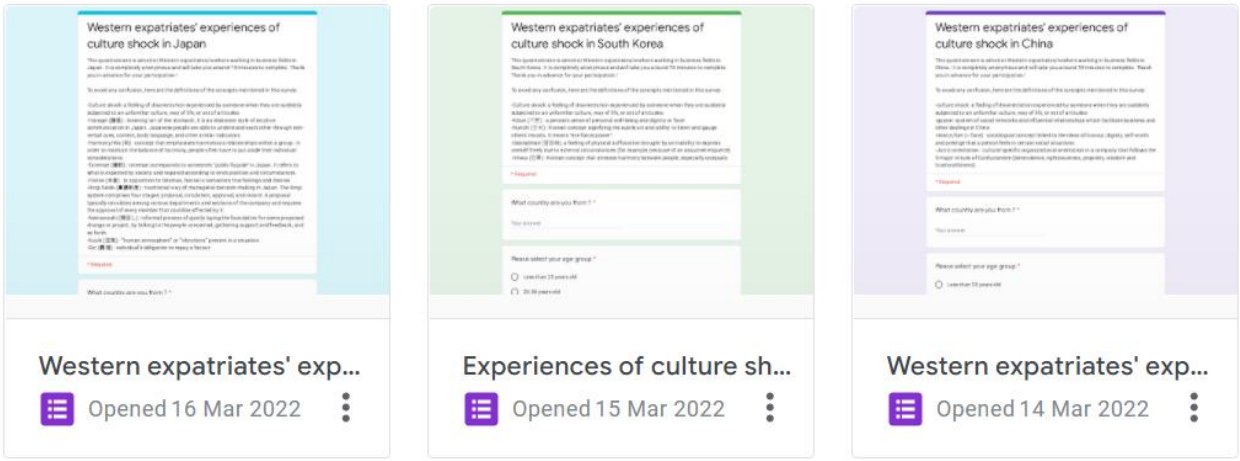


Figure 20: *An overview of the three questionnaires*

Three distinct questionnaires (rather than one) were created to collect data more efficiently. As many specific concepts of China, Japan and South Korea needed to be mentioned, mixing them in a single survey would have ultimately confused the participants, who were very unlikely to be familiar with them all. A single questionnaire would have been very time-consuming for the participants, especially considering that a long survey does represent a typical deterrent to the participation of people.

Each questionnaire follows a similar pattern. A brief introductory paragraph provides information about the target group, the anonymity, and the estimated time it takes to complete the survey. Furthermore, definitions of the concepts mentioned in the survey are provided to avoid confusion for those who are not familiar with them or would not be sure that the meaning they think of is the correct one. This introduction varies in length depending on the number of concepts connected with each country, in line with what was discussed in the theoretical part. For example, while the questionnaire about Japan introduces eight concepts, the one about South Korea mentions only four concepts (cf. Figure 21 below).

Figure 21: *Introduction to the questionnaire for Western expatriates working in China*

Following this introduction, demographic questions were asked to get information about the participants, such as their country of origin, their gender, the position in the company they work for, their Chinese/Japanese/Korean language skills, or even the time spent working in the country. In addition to providing demographic data, these questions could potentially explain why someone has had more experiences of culture shock in East Asia. For example, it could be assumed that someone who does not speak the language of the country at all might be more vulnerable to experiencing culture shock compared to those who speak it with high proficiency. Learning a language is after all not only absorbing vocabulary and grammar but also gradually soaking up new culture-related traditions and norms, some of which might include the concepts that were discussed in the theoretical part. The questions that were presented at the beginning of each questionnaire are the following:

1. *What country are you from?*
2. *Please select your age group*
    a. *Less than 20 years old*
    b. *20-30 years old*
    c. *30-40 years old*
    d. *40-50 years old*
    e. *50-60 years old*
    f. *More than 60 years old*
3. *Please select your gender*

    a. *Male*
    b. *Female*
    c. *Prefer not to say*
4. *How long have you been working in [East Asian country]?*
    a. *Less than one year*
    b. *1-5 years*
    c. *5-10 years*
    d. *More than 10 years*
5. *In which business field do you work?*
6. *What is your position in the company? (ex: CEO, manager, consultant, etc.)*
7. *Can you speak [language of the East Asian country]?*
    a. *Yes, at an intermediate/advanced level*
    b. *Yes, at a beginner level*
    c. *No*

Questions related to specific concepts were then included in the questionnaires, their number depending on how many were discussed in the theoretical part (for example, 35 questions linked to concepts were asked in the Japanese questionnaire, while "only" 19 were requested for the Chinese version). Each concept was discussed following a similar pattern:

1. ***Are you familiar with [concept]?***

This was a compulsory closed question that could only be answered by "yes" or "no". The goal here was to check each participant's familiarity with the concept and, by extension, to verify its relevance as a potential factor of culture shock.

2. ***If you have answered 'yes' to the previous question, how would you rate the impact of [concept] in your working environment?***

This question was only aimed at those who knew the concept and served the purpose of exploring its actual influence in the participants' workplaces. For this question, a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was provided, with number 1 corresponding to a lack of presence in the working environment (named "not present at all") and number 5 corresponding to a very high presence in said place (named "extremely present").

3. ***Would you say that [concept] has been a factor of culture shock for you when you started working in [East Asian country]?***

The third question aimed to explore the participants' personal experiences. The respondents could either answer "yes/no" or add their own personal answer by using the blank space provided (cf. Figure 22).

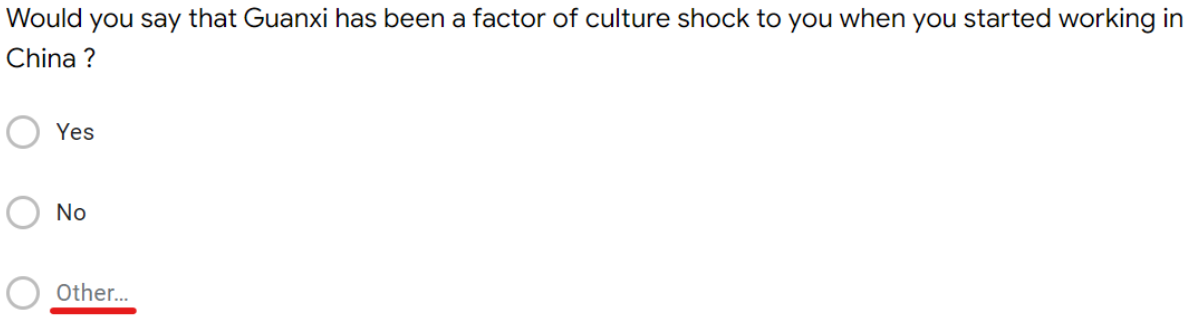


Figure 22: *Example of a blank space in one of the questionnaires*

4. ***Why?***

This open question directly followed the third one and sought to know the reasons behind the respondents' previous answers, whether the concept represented a factor of culture shock for them or not. By allowing the participants to write freely, it was assumed that important additional information could be gathered, which would ultimately be useful to know which concepts Western people need to pay attention to when they are about to work in East Asia, and by contrast, which of them have a much lower risk of triggering culture shock.

5. ***On a scale from 1 to 5, please rate the likelihood that [concept] could represent a factor of culture shock to a Western expatriate working for the first time in [East Asian country].***

This last concept-related question was meant to capture the participants' estimation of the likelihood that the concept mentioned could turn into a factor of culture shock for other Western workers. Number 1 corresponded to the lowest score ("Far from being a factor of culture shock"), while number 5 could be found at the end of the scale with the description "Very likely to become a factor of culture shock".

Following these specific questions, more general questions related to the intercultural experience of the participants were also asked:

1. *On a more general level, how frequently were you faced with culture shock when working in [East Asian country] for the first time?*

2. *According to you, what was the reason for this culture shock? (You can select several answers)*
    a. *Language barrier*
    b. *Problems of nonverbal communication (bowing, eye contact, etc.)*
    c. *Unknown concepts and traditions that are part of [East Asian country]*
    d. *Other (please specify)*
3. *Did you receive any cross-cultural training before coming to [East Asian country]*
4. *If you answered "yes" to the previous question, could you explain what this training was? Did you find it useful to avoid culture shock in the [East Asian country] workplace?*
5. *What advice would you give to future business expatriates in [East Asian country] to minimise the impact of culture shock in their working environment?*

The first two questions aimed to collect more general data about the participants' experiences of culture shock and to potentially gather valuable information that was not related to any of the concepts discussed previously. Questions 3 and 4 were designed to find out if the participants had received training before they arrived in China, Japan, or South Korea. Finally, the participants were asked to give advice to future business expatriates working in East Asia.

4.2.2. Interview

Because of the sanitary situation at the time, the interview with Dr Terry Lidarssi was conducted through a face call on Whatsapp and was recorded on my computer thanks to pre-installed software. Several questions related to intercultural experience were prepared before the interview:

- *Have you ever had professional encounters with workers from East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea)? If so, were you surprised/intrigued by certain aspects of their behaviour (e.g. non-verbal communication, greetings, exchange of cards, ...)*
- *Did you notice a difference in the way they negotiate/business compared to you?*
- *Have you noticed different ways of negotiating between these East Asian countries? (e.g. differences between China and Japan, differences between Japan and South Korea, etc.)*
- *How long do negotiations with these workers usually last (a few days, a week, several weeks?)*
- *Is there an exchange of gifts during these negotiations? If so, are there any rules that need to be respected?*

- *Is there a need to compromise during these negotiations? If so, by whom? Which party tends to compromise more?*
- *Have you ever had an experience where negotiations were damaged or even completely cancelled? What do you think was the trigger?*
- *Have you received any training, courses, or information on how to conduct negotiations effectively with East Asian workers? If so, do you think this theoretical learning has helped you?*
- *What advice would you give to workers who want to do business in East Asia? Are there things to avoid?*

However, the interview quickly turned into a more laid-back conversation, and not all questions were eventually asked, as some of them were being indirectly answered by Mr Lidarssi during the exchange. Over the period of one hour and fifteen minutes, extra information related to doing business with East Asian workers was gathered. Afterwards, the recording allowed me to transcribe the interview and to keep the most valuable parts for my research, as some information discussed in the conversation was off the subject. The results can be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: Results and discussion

This chapter presents and analyses the data obtained from the questionnaires and the interview. Since three questionnaires were created, each of them will be discussed separately (China, Japan, and finally South Korea) for more clarity. Two sub-sections feature in each discussion; they are named as follows: knowledge of the concepts and intercultural experience. The results of the interview will follow and be separated according to each East Asian aspect that was addressed by Dr Lidarssi. The last section of the practical part will be dedicated to a broader discussion of the findings.

5.1. Results of the online questionnaires

Given the considerable amount of data that was collected from the three questionnaires, only the most significant findings will be discussed in the following sections. All the results and corresponding graphs can be found in Appendix 1.

5.1.1. China

5.1.1.1. Knowledge of the concepts

The findings reveal that *Guanxi* (i.e. system of connections in Chinese society) and *Mianzi/Lian* (i.e. the Chinese version of *face*) are known by 84.2% of the participants. By contrast, 63.2% of the respondents are not familiar with *Jun-zi orientation* (i.e. a Chinese business orientation based on Confucian values). When it comes to their influence within Chinese society, the three concepts are deemed as moderately to highly present, *Mianzi/Lian* representing the concept that obtains the highest score in this aspect (cf. Table 10 below).

14. ***If you have answered "yes" to the previous question, how would you rate the impact of Mianzi and Lian in your working environment?***

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	0	0	3	7	7	17
%	0.0 %	0.0 %	17.6 %	41.2%	41.2 %	100 %

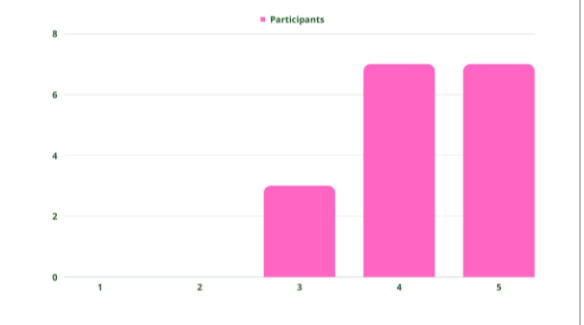


Table 10: *Answers to Question 14 in the first questionnaire and related bar chart*

Interestingly, *Mianzi/Lian* is also the concept that most often represents a factor of culture shock for the participants. To the question: "*Would you say that [concept] has been a factor of culture shock for you when you started working in China?"*, more than 80% of the participants select "no" for *Guanxi* and *Jun-zi orientation*, while "yes" is chosen by 47.1% of the respondents for *Mianzi/Lian*. In line with the results, *Mianzi/Lian* is also frequently seen as a potential factor of culture shock for future Western business expatriates working in China, as Number 5 on the Likert scale is selected by 41.2% of the participants (cf. Table 13).

17. *On a scale from 1 to 5, please rate the likelihood that Mianzi/Lian could represent a factor of culture shock to a Western expatriate working for the first time in China*

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	1	0	6	3	7	17
%	5.9 %	0.0 %	35.3 %	17.6%	41.2 %	100 %

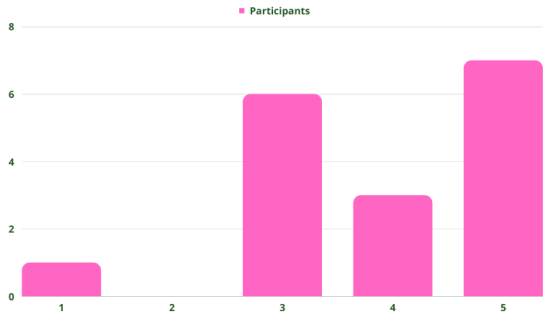


Table 13: *Answers to Question 17 in the first questionnaire and related bar chart*

Even though *Guanxi* and *Jun-zi orientation* triggered culture shock in very few of the participants, they are believed to involve a medium to high risk of culture shock for future Western business expatriates (on the average, *Jun-zi orientation* obtains a score of 3 on the Likert scale, while *Guanxi* receives a 4). It is also interesting to note the reasons why a majority of the participants did not experience culture shock: generally, the respondents mention similarities with their culture of origin (e.g. "*guanxi*" as another word for "networking"), or even the fact that they were familiar with the concept prior to their arrival in China. Additional reasons for experiencing (or not) culture shock because of a Chinese concept can be observed in Table 7 below (related to Guanxi).

11. *Why?*	
Reasons for *guanxi* to represent a factor of culture shock (3)	Reasons for *guanxi* NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (10)
- Differences with the culture of origin (// challenge) (1) - Relationships are favoured over business priorities (1) - Perspective changing (1)	- Similarities with the country of origin or other parts of the world (*guanxi* = another word for networking) (3) - Guanxi is not that important in the participant's business field (3) - Easiness to adjust to it (1) - Prior knowledge of China (thanks to a partner, for example) (3)

Table 7: *Summary of the answers to Question 11 in the first questionnaire*

Concerning the Chinese's typical negotiating strategy, a majority of the participants select "Cooperative Egoism" (i.e. a negotiating strategy in which the two parties cooperate but one party tries to gain more than the other, selected by 41.2% of the participants), followed by the Win-Win strategy (i.e. a negotiation style that promotes a favourable outcome for both parties, chosen by 23% of the participants) (cf. Table 14).

18. *For those who have experience in negotiations, how would you qualify the Chinese's typical negotiating strategy?*

	WW	**WL**	**CE**	**CN**	**OTHER**	**T**
A	4	2	7	1	3	17
%	23.5%	11.8 %	41.2 %	5.9 %	17.6%	10 0%

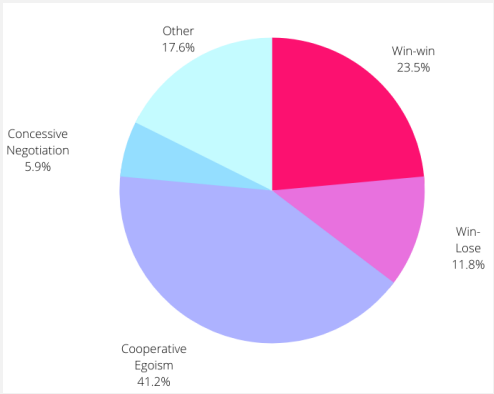


Table 14: *Answers to Question 18 in the first questionnaire and related pie chart*

The chosen strategy is on average not a factor of culture shock for the participants (76.5%), and the reasons for this vary: those most often mentioned are prior knowledge of China, similarities with the country of origin, the logical aspect of the strategy, or even that there is "just a need to adapt" (cf. Table 16). The negotiating strategies are generally associated with a

medium risk of culture shock, Number 3 being the most frequently selected option on the Likert scale.

20. Why?[7]	
Reasons for the selected strategy to represent a factor of culture shock (2)	Reasons for the selected strategy NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (11)
- Against one's values (SS: other) (1) - Difficulties to establish a trustful relationship (SS: CE) (1)	- Similarities with the country of origin or other parts of the world (SS: CE) (2) - Prior knowledge of China (SS: CE + other + WW) (4) - "People are people", "logical" (SS: CE + WW) (2) - Not a shock but a need to adapt (SS: CE) (2) - Win-win = fabricated idea (SS: WL) (1)

Table 16: *Summary of the answers to Question 20 in the first questionnaire*

5.1.1.2. Intercultural experience

The participants of the survey were generally frequently faced with culture shock when they first worked in China, as can be seen in Table 23 below.

27. On a more general level, how frequently were you faced with culture shock when working in China for the first time?						
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	0	3	6	9	1	19
%	0.0 %	15.8 %	31.6 %	47.4%	5.3 %	100 %

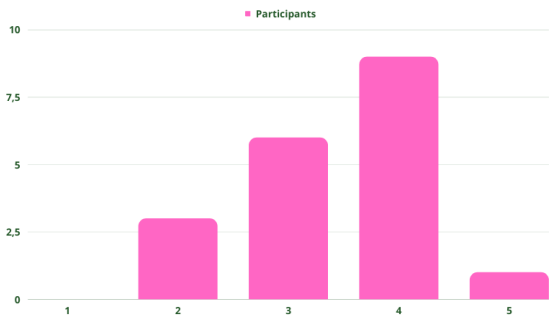


Table 23: *Answers to Question 27 in the first questionnaire and related bar chart*

[7] SS : Selected Strategy. CE : Cooperative Egoism. WW : Win-Win. WL : Win-Lose.

The data show that the main reasons for experiencing culture shock are the language barrier (55.6%) and unknown traditions and concepts that are part of Chinese society (50%). Additionally, the participants write the following answers: “small habits that are not presented in the questionnaire”, “work hours in China”, “the thinking process of Chinese business workers”, “unrealistic expectations of the other party” and “different relationship between employees and management”.

In relation to preparation, a majority of the participants (84.2%) did not receive any training before working in China. Those who did were asked to describe the training and to judge its usefulness in preventing culture shock. The data displayed in Table 26 reveal that one of these formations is linked to studies/work (specialist of East Asian culture), while the other corresponds to a course offered at a company. In general, the training is characterised as “good”, but one respondent insists that it does not prevent culture shock.

30. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, could you explain what this training was? Did you find it useful to avoid culture shock in the Chinese workplace?	
Training	Comments about the training
1. Brief overview of the rules that the corporation was expected to follow + teaching of the Chinese perspectives on certain things	/
2. /	The training allows to understand but does not avoid the shock itself
3. Student, then teacher of East Asian culture	Fairly good training

Table 26: *Summary of the answers to Question 30 in the first questionnaire*

Ultimately, the respondents were asked to give advice to future business expatriates working in China. Overall, their answers indicate that the impact of culture shock can be reduced by learning the language of the country, discussing with expats, or even reading books about China. More advice can be observed in Table 27.

31. What advice would you give to future business expatriates in China to minimise the impact of culture shock in their working environment?
- Learn the language (4) - Ask for information about Chinese culture, get prepared (2) - Be open-minded/Respect the differences (2) - Get some cultural training (2) - Discuss with current or previous expats (3) - Read books about China (3) - Learn to stand up for yourself (1) - Read books on cultural differences (1)

Table 27: *Summary of the answers to Question 31 in the first questionnaire*

5.1.2. Japan

5.1.2.1. Knowledge of the concepts

The results show that most of the Japanese concepts are known by more than 80% of the participants, except for *Haragei* (i.e. a Japanese concept linked to non-verbal communication, known by 69.4% of the participants), *Ringi Seido* (i.e. a decision-making process in Japanese business, known by 63.3% of the participants) and *Nemawashi* (i.e. a consensus-building process used in Japan, known by 63.3% of the participants). It is interesting to note that only one participant out of 49 is not familiar with *Tatemae/Honne* (i.e. a concept linked to hiding or revealing one's true feelings within Japanese society).

Some of the concepts are deemed as much more present within the participants' workplaces than others. *Tatemae/Honne* is unquestionably the most influential (obtaining an average score of 5 on the Likert scale), followed by those who receive an average score of 4: *Haragei*, *Harmony/Wa*, and *Nemawashi*. *Kuuki* (i.e. the "human atmosphere" present in a situation) is a special case as numbers 3, 4 and 5 are selected by the same amount of people (cf. Table 54). Across all the concepts mentioned in the questionnaire, *Giri* (i.e. the need to repay a favour) is perceived as the least influential in the participants' workplaces, even though it still obtains an average score of 3 on the Likert scale.

34. *If you have answered "yes" to the previous question, how would you rate the impact of Kuuki in your working environment?*						
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	2	3	13	13	13	44
%	4.5 %	6.8 %	29.5 %	29.5%	29.5 %	100 %

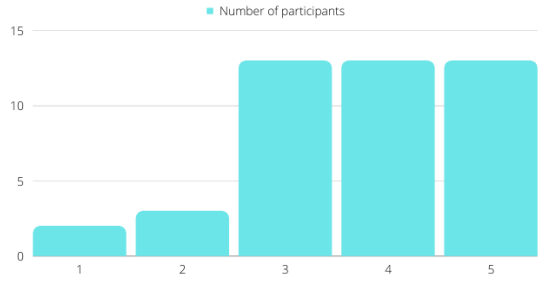


Table 54: *Answers to Question 34 in the second questionnaire and related bar chart*

Most of the Japanese concepts are not identified as factors of culture shock by the participants, except for *Tatemae/Honne* and *Ringi Seido*. *Tatemae/Honne* triggered culture shock in 42.9% of the participants, while 57.1% of the respondents experienced it because of *Ringi Seido*. The reason that is often mentioned for *Tatemae/Honne* to be a factor of culture shock is that the concept can be interpreted as a lack of honesty or as hypocrisy. As for *Ringi Seido*, a majority of the participants mention that the process is "useless", time-consuming and that too many people need to be involved. Additional reasons for the two concepts to be considered (or not) factors of culture shock can be observed in Table 41 and Table 46 below.

21. Why?	
Reasons for *Tatemae/Honne* to represent a factor of culture shock (23)	Reasons for *Tatemae/Honne* NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (21)
Differences with the culture of origin (public façade = just a cover) (5) Can be interpreted as a lack of honesty or even as hypocrisy (6) Specific to Japan (2) It takes a long time to get to know a Japanese business worker on a personal level (2) May lead to lying (1) Difficulties to differentiate between what is honest and what is not (4)	Similarities with other countries and/or parts of the world (10) (although the participants usually admit that it is more extreme in Japan) Not specific to the Japanese (1) Perceived more as an annoyance than a shock (2) Appropriate preparation and/or prior experience in Japan (4) Not present everywhere (1) Not difficult to assimilate (2)

Causes disappointment and difficulties to trust (3)	"It's an art form" (1)

Table 41: *Summary of the answers to Question 21 in the second questionnaire*

26. Why?	
Reasons for *Reigi Seido* to represent a factor of culture shock (19)	Reasons for *Reigi Seido* NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (8)
Differences with the culture of origin (Westerners want to make decisions quickly) (1) "Useless" and too time-consuming (13) Outdated (1) May lead to power harassment (1) Nothing is explained (1) Too many people need to be involved (2)	More perceived as an annoyance (1) "Well-known" (1) Just a need to adapt (2) Allows company cohesion to form (1) Enhances group thinking (1) Sufficient preparation (1) Efficient (1)

Table 46: *Summary of the answers to Question 26 in the second questionnaire*

Unlike *Tatemae/Honne* and *Ringi Seido*, *Nemawashi* is one of the concepts that very rarely triggered culture shock in the participants (only 16.7% of the participants admit to having experienced culture shock because of *Nemawashi*). The most frequently mentioned reasons for this are that the concept is not specific to Japan and that sufficient preparation prevented the participant from experiencing culture shock. Like in the case of *Guanxi*, one participant wrote that it is "just another form of networking". Other reasons can be found in Table 51 below.

31. Why?	
Reasons for *Nemawashi* to represent a factor of culture shock (3)	Reasons for *Nemawashi* NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (22)
Too time-consuming (2) Too many people need to be involved (1)	Similar to the country of origin or other parts of the world (14) Satisfaction with the system (3) Just another form of networking (1) Sufficient preparation and/or previous experience in Japan (3) Not perceived as a shock (1)

Table 51: *Summary of the answers to Question 31 in the second questionnaire*

The same paradox that has been identified for the questionnaire about China is present in this survey. Although most of the Japanese concepts are not deemed as "factors of culture shock" by the participants, most of them are characterised as "likely" or even as "very likely" to become a factor of culture shock for future Western business expatriates. In this aspect, *Tatemae/Honne* once again obtains the highest score (see Table 42), followed by *Haragei* (average score of 5 on the Likert scale) and *Ringi Seido* (average score of 4 on the Likert scale).

22. *On a scale from 1 to 5, please rate the likeliness that Tatemae/Honne could represent a factor of culture shock to a Western expatriate working for the first time in Japan*

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	4	6	5	12	22	49
%	8.2 %	12.2 %	10.2 %	24.5%	44.9 %	100 %

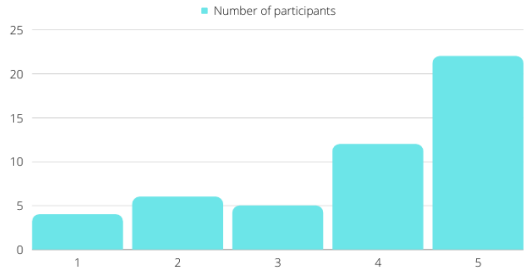


Table 42: *Answers to Question 22 in the second questionnaire and related bar chart*

5.1.2.2. Intercultural experience

Unlike the questionnaire about China, the participants of this survey have more diverse opinions related to their experiences of culture shock, which makes it difficult to determine a trend from the results. As can be observed in Table 63 below, the participants generally experienced culture shock when they first worked in Japan, even though the frequency seems to vary from one person to the other.

43. *On a more general level, how frequently have you been faced with culture shock when working in Japan for the first time?*

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	2	13	11	16	7	49
%	4.1 %	26.5 %	22.4 %	32.7%	14.3 %	100 %

Table 63: *Answers to Question 43 in the second questionnaire and related bar chart*

The causes of culture shock that are put forward by the participants are mainly linked to unknown concepts and traditions of the country, followed by the language barrier and other reasons. These additional reasons are written by the participants themselves and include some of the following ideas: “decision making in Japan”, “extremely harsh working conditions”, “deep profound racism”, “complicated hierarchy”, “institutional customs”, “the Japanese’s passive behaviour”, “seating arrangements in rooms and taxis”, “many useless codes”, “differences between knowing a concept and experiencing it for real”, “being penalised for doing what one was told”, “cultural aspects related to *Bousai* (i.e. disaster prevention)”, “how personal and professional lives are intermingled” and “interviewers asking women if they want to have children in the future”.

44. According to you, what was the reason for this culture shock? (You can select several answers)

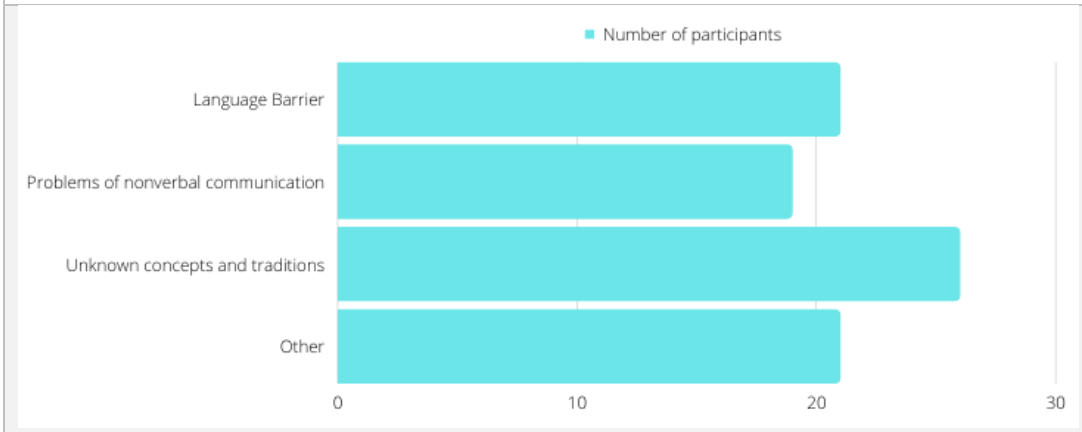


Table 64: *Answers to Question 44 in the second questionnaire and related bar chart*

Echoing the questionnaire on China, a majority of the participants (67.3%) did not receive any cross-cultural training before working in Japan. Nevertheless, about a third of them did benefit from such preparation, which gives a more complete overview of the range of training available for Western business workers. The data displayed in Table 66 show that the most popular formations are linked to education (studies or Japanese lessons), companies (introduction to Japanese cultural aspects) and personal preparation (research, interactions with Japanese students, etc.). Such formations are often qualified as “helpful”, even though some participants insist that they do not solve the issue of culture shock.

46. ***If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, could you explain what this training was? Did you find it useful to avoid culture shock in the Japanese workplace?***	
Training (15)	Comments about the training
1. Japanese studies at university (3)	/
2. Previous experience in South Korea (1)	/
3. Several formations (no names provided) (1)	Very helpful
4. Jet Program (1)	Somewhat helpful
5. Personal research (1)	"By knowing what to expect from a culture, you can minimise culture shock"
6. Interactions with Japanese students (1)	/
7. Introduction to Japanese cultural aspects (1)	Useful to understand Japanese people and to expect miscommunications. Nevertheless, it does not solve the issue of culture shock.
8. Training provided by the company (1)	"Somewhat useful but the only way to learn is through experience"
9. Intensive Japanese lessons 5 days/week before starting full-time work (1)	Really helpful preparation
10. Cultural awareness training for airport employees and general sexual harassment training (1)	/
11. Overview of the cultural standards that need to be respected in a Japanese school (1)	/
12. Online resources, meetings with Japanese members and post-arrival cultural training that the participant developed for himself/herself (1)	/
13. One course at INALCO Langues'O (1)	/

Table 66: *Summary of the answers to Question 46 in the second questionnaire*

The advice given to future business expatriates in Japan is equally varied. The most frequently mentioned ideas are "learning the language", "learning about the culture", "being open-minded" and "expecting to get a shock" (cf. Table 67).

47. What advice would you give to future business expatriates in Japan to minimise the impact of culture shock in their working environment?
- Learn the language (13) - Prepare properly (3) - Get familiar with the concepts mentioned, and be aware of their existence (2) - Study the culture and culture differences (9) - Read up on manners (1) - Join a Facebook group to learn about life as an expat (1) - Find someone that can help you with the things you don't understand (1) - Learn Japanese proverbs (1) - Talk to Japanese people or experienced expats (1) - Expect to get a shock (4) - Expect to be treated differently (1) - Take a cross-cultural training before coming to the country (2) - Be open-minded (6) - Be patient and kind (1) - Listen and observe more than you speak (3) - Don't take things personally (1) - Watch movies and participate in video calls (1) - Watch closely your co-workers (1)

Table 67: *Summary of the answers to Question 47 in the second questionnaire*

5.1.3. South Korea

5.1.3.1. Knowledge of the concepts

The findings show that all the Korean concepts mentioned in the survey are generally known to the participants: the least familiar concept is *Inhwa/Harmony*, though it is unknown to only 27.3% of the respondents. The three concepts have a medium to high influence in the participants' workplaces: *Kibun* (i.e. dignity, the Korean version of *face*) obtains an average score of 4 on the Likert scale, while *Nunchi* (i.e. the ability to perceive other people's moods) and *Inhwa/Harmony* both receive a 3.

9. *If you have answered "yes" to the previous question, how would you rate the impact of Kibun in your working environment?*

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	1	0	4	5	0	10
%	10 %	0.0 %	40%	50%	0.0 %	100 %

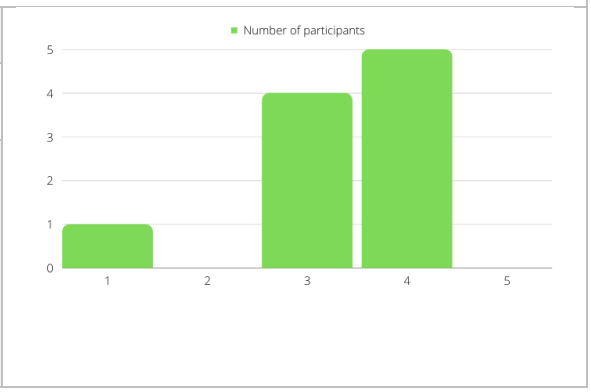


Table 69: *Answers to Question 9 of the third questionnaire and related bar chart*

To the question "*Would you say that [concept] has been a factor of culture shock for you when you started working in South Korea*?", the three concepts obtain a majority of "no". Nevertheless, *Inhwa/Harmony* is characterised as a factor of culture shock by almost half of the participants (45.5%). It should also be stressed that these results must be taken with caution, as only 11 people have participated in the survey.

As in the first two questionnaires, it is interesting to know the reasons why a concept is considered (or not) a factor of culture shock. In the case of *Kibun*, the participants mention their familiarity with the concept before working in South Korea and its universal aspect when they do not consider it a factor of culture shock. By contrast, those who did experience culture shock because of *Kibun* highlight feelings of injustice and confusion, impact on how information is shared, and the need to guess other people's feelings.

11. *Why?*	
Reasons for *Kibun* to represent a factor of culture shock (3)	Reasons for *Kibun* NOT to represent a factor of culture shock (4)
Impacts how one speaks to others, and how information is shared (1) Leads to feelings of injustice and confusion (1) Need to guess other people's feelings (1)	Universal concept (similar to other countries) (3) Previous knowledge of the concept (1)

Table 71: *Answers to Question 11 in the third questionnaire*

Echoing the first two questionnaires, the paradox that was previously highlighted occurs once again in this survey. Although the Korean concepts did not trigger culture shock in a majority of the participants, they are on average rated as "likely" to become a factor of culture shock for future Western expatriates working in South Korea, as can be observed in the example of *Nunchi* below: although *Nunchi* is not considered a factor of culture shock for 63.6% of the participants, Number 4 is the most selected option on the Likert scale.

17. *On a scale from 1 to 5, please rate the likelihood that Nunchi could represent a factor of culture shock for a Western expatriate working for the first time in South Korea*

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**T**
A	1	1	2	4	2	10
%	10 %	10%	20%	40%	20%	100 %

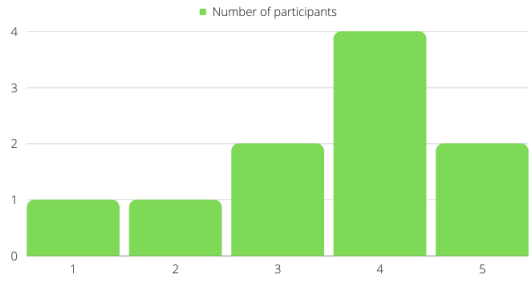


Table 77: *Results to Question 17 in the third questionnaire and related bar chart*

As a reminder of the theoretical part, *Dabdabhae* is a concept linked to social harmony, which is described as "a feeling of physical suffocation brought by an inability to express oneself freely due to external circumstances". According to the survey, a majority of the participants (54.5%) experienced it in their working environment. The reasons for this include the inability to express one's real opinion, the importance of hierarchy, as well as racism and self-centrism on the part of Korean elders (cf. Table 79).

19. *If you have answered 'yes' to the previous question, why?*

Causes of Dabdabhae (5) :

Racism and self-centrism of elders (1)

Hierarchy is more important than expertise, which leads to frustration (1)

People do not reveal their feelings, even when they are asked about (2)

Inability to express one's real opinion and ideas (1)

Table 79*: Answers to Question 19 in the third questionnaire*

5.1.3.2. Intercultural experience of the participants

As in the questionnaire about Japan, the participants of this survey were faced with culture shock when they first worked in South Korea, but the frequency varies and a trend can

hardly be determined from the graph, especially considering the number of participants (cf. Table 85).

25. *On a more general level, how frequently were you faced with culture shock when working in South Korea for the first time?*

	1	2	3	4	5	T
A	2	1	4	4	0	11
%	18.2%	9.1 %	36.4 %	36.4%	0.0 %	100 %

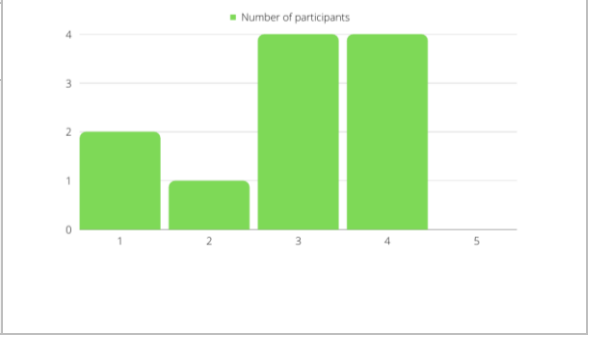


Table 85: *Answers to Question 25 in the third questionnaire and related bar chart*

The data collected reveal that two popular reasons for experiencing culture shock in South Korea are "unknown concepts and traditions" as well as the language barrier (cf. Table 86). However, much more participants decided to write their own answer and gave the following reasons: "moderate corruption", "lack of communication and/or indirect communication", "favour-based working culture", and "weird processes".

26. According to you, what was the reason for this culture shock?

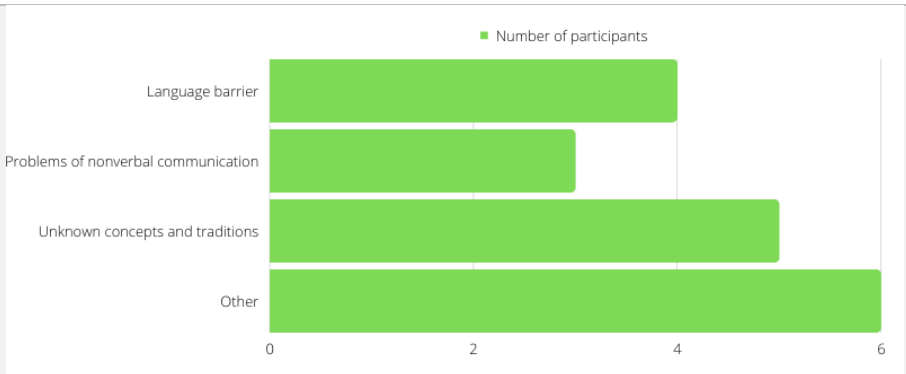


Table 86: *Bar chart related to Question 26's answers*

In line with the first two questionnaires, most of the participants (54.5%) in the survey did not benefit from cross-cultural training before working in South Korea. For those who did, formations linked to relationships (Korean partner), education (studies) and work (experience in NGOs) are mentioned. They are usually commented on as "useful", even though one participant states that his/her training lacked detail (cf. Table 88).

28. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, could you explain what this training was? Did you find it useful to avoid culture shock in the Korean workplace?	
Training	Comments about the training
1. Korean partner	Very useful
2. Degree in Korean language and civilisation	Good base of information on Korean culture
3. Experience in NGOs as part of fellowships offered through a college centre	/
4. /	Not enough details

Table 88: *Answers to Question 28 in the third questionnaire*

The advice given in this last survey is various, even though it mostly reflects the information provided in the two previous questionnaires. Overall, the results show that the ideas most frequently mentioned by the participants are linked to "learning the culture before working in South Korea" and "learning the language of the country". Other advice includes keeping an open mind, expecting to be treated as a foreigner, and analysing situations before reacting. More advice can be found in Table 89 below.

29. What advice would you give to future business expatriates in South Korea to minimise the impact of culture shock in their working environment?
Learn about the culture beforehand (ex: by looking up information online, watching dramas related to work, etc.) (4)
Be expected to be treated as a foreigner (1)
Follow what your co-workers do (1)
Learn Korean (2)
Analyse situations to react accordingly (1)
Do not take things seriously (1)
Keep an open mind (1)
"When in Rome, do as the Romans do" (1)

Table 89*: Answers to Question 29 in the third questionnaire*

5.2. Interview data

The following sections present the main ideas of several aspects of East Asia that were discussed by Lidarssi during the interview. For each East Asian aspect, a quote extracted from the CEO's testimony is presented and followed by a summary comment.

I. Indirect Communication

"East Asians, whether they are from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand; all these countries, they will never say no to you because it's a lack of respect for you. They can't say no."

According to Terry Lidarssi, people from East Asia never say "no", as it can represent a big lack of respect for others. The problem is that this habit often leads to extremely difficult situations: since the Western worker is not being told "no" to his/her request, he/she thinks that it must necessarily mean "yes", which is a huge cultural mistake. As an example, Mr Lidarssi shares a story that happened to people around him while he was studying Chinese medicine in Shanghai: at that time, he knew of a group of foreign students that was essentially composed of French and Italians. After their exams, the group saw that the examiner was looking at the papers and went to ask her if the exam went well; a question to which she answered "yes". In the Chinese mindset, this nevertheless does not mean that the students passed the exam, but rather that no problems were encountered during the process: the papers were properly distributed, the students wrote on them and answered the questions they were asked, and so on. In other words, the **procedure** went well, but since the group of foreign students had a different interpretation of the word "yes", they confidently thought that they had passed the exam; a belief that was unexpectedly shattered when they learned that they had actually *failed*.

Another example that Mr Lidarssi mentions is the typical miscommunication between Western foreigners and Chinese manufacturers. As Hauliga's CEO describes: "if the foreign party asks for 100 000 pieces to be produced for next month, the Chinese manufacturer will generally say "yes", even though he/she knows that it is impossible." Terry Lidarssi further explains that once the agreed month has passed and the foreign business workers realise that none of the pieces has arrived in their country, they will contact the Chinese manufacturer to find out what is going on. During the call, the foreign negotiators will usually be asked to wait one or two more days, but a couple of days will quickly turn into a matter of months, which is likely to create tensions between the two parties.

II. Face

> *"What they [The Chinese] often do, when the situation goes wrong, is to smile, because culturally, you can't lose face."*

According to Terry Lidarssi, *Face* is another important element that distinguishes Chinese from Western workers. To avoid losing face, the Chinese prevent themselves from showing too many emotions. For example, being angry in public is frowned upon by the community, and the same goes with the display of positive emotions: someone who seems too happy in society is as likely to lose his/her face as someone who throws a fit. When a particular situation makes someone embarrassed, the person generally conceals his/her inconvenience with a smile, as smiling is considered the most appropriate expression to maintain one's face in China. In this manner, *Face* is highly linked with the Chinese's indirect communication that was discussed in the previous section: the first can be kept thanks to the second.

III. Forms of respect

> *"In Belgium, if you are given a business card with one hand, you will take it with one hand. You will look at the name or not, leave it on the table or in your pocket. You will say thank you and start the meeting. If you do that in Asia, it's really a great lack of respect, they will be deeply shocked."*

Based on Terry Lidarssi's testimony, forms of respect differ from Western countries (Belgium in this case) to China. Chinese business workers always give their business cards with two hands and receive the other party's cards in the same manner. Afterwards, they usually take some time to read the card and expect their partners to do the same. To further show one's interest, Mr Lidarssi advises repeating the name of the person written on the card or even giving a little nod; two signs of attention that should be sufficient to communicate respect to the Chinese business worker.

Chinese people can easily be shocked by an inappropriate exchange of business cards, but it should be noted that certain things that seem trivial in China would be deemed unacceptable in Belgium. For example, it is not unusual in a business meeting to hear Chinese businesspeople farting or clearing their throats. Terry Lidarssi argues that this behaviour is due to the Chinese belief that everything that needs to be removed from the body should not be retained.

IV. Hierarchy

> *"What is difficult with the Japanese is hierarchy. You want to talk to the director, but the secretary can't talk to him, the superior can't talk to him, etc. Sometimes it takes a long time to talk to the right person."*

In his testimony, Terry Lidarssi mentions the Japanese hierarchy, which can sometimes cause problems for foreign workers. As not everyone is treated equally in Japanese business, it may take a huge amount of time to finally be able to speak to the most powerful person in the company. Mr Lidarssi points out that it can take up to 25 minutes to speak to the right person in Japan. This implies a significant loss of time, but also of money, as making a call from Belgium to Japan is very expensive.

V. Collectivism

> *"What you have to watch out for with Asians, especially with Chinese and Taiwanese people, is that they are not proactive, sometimes it can be frustrating because they don't make decisions. They make collective decisions, not individual ones."*

Collectivism is another aspect of Chinese society mentioned by Dr Terry Lidarssi, which ultimately results in a frustrating lack of proactivity: as everyone's opinion must be considered before taking a decision, money and time can be lost. To illustrate this, Mr Lidarssi talks about his own experience: one time when he was making business in China, a Chinese woman that was working with him realised that there was a mistake on the product samples and called to warn Terry. After this, she did however not call the factory to signal the problem but let it produce bottles that had a mistake on them for a whole week. At that moment, Mr Lidarssi truly deplored her lack of proactivity.

VI. Relationships

> *"They try to be nice but they only think about one thing: money."*

When asked about the value of relationships in China, Terry Lidarssi explains that Chinese businesspeople typically try to get to know their foreign partners at first, but that overall no emotions are involved at work, as everyone's goal is to earn money. That being said, it is generally assumed that gifts (mainly specialities of one's home country) be brought at the beginning of each meeting. In relation to Face, the Chinese will never disapprove of a gift, even if they actually hate it.

VII. Negotiations

> *"If Chinese businesspeople make something that costs 3 euros, with the electricity and the seller's commission included, they will eventually have to sell it for at least 8 euros. During the negotiations, they will want to sell it for 30 and then it will go down. If we go down to 15, we'll be happy because we'll think that we've got the product at half price, but the Chinese know that they're the ones who made a very good deal."*

Dr Lidarssi explains that as the Chinese hardly ever say "no", a foreign negotiator will be able to reduce drastically the price of a product. Nevertheless, the price reduction is bound to be reflected in the quality of the product, which means that the foreign worker who manages to reduce considerably the price of an item will eventually end up with a very lousy article. The above extract from Mr Lidarssi's testimony also highlights the Chinese's typical negotiating strategy, which is very similar to Cooperative Egoism.

VIII. Training

As part of his cultural training, Dr Lidarssi refers to some prior knowledge of Chinese culture thanks to his doctorate in Chinese medicine as well as the 11 years he spent in China. He also mentions the help that he received from several local partners, which is apparently extremely beneficial for foreign business workers.

IX. Advice for Western people who want to do business in East Asia

At the end of the interview, Terry Lidarssi gave several pieces of advice that could be useful for future Western workers in East Asia:

- **Go without preconceptions**: it is important not to believe what the media says about certain countries.
- **Remove the feeling of European superiority from your mind**: apparently many Western expatriates that arrive in Asia think that they are superior.

- **Find a local guide**: according to Mr Lidarssi, finding a guide saves you a lot of time and money.
- **Learn the minimum rules of respect.**
- **Know what you want**: as East Asians are not proactive, it is important to arrive with the specifications.
- **Write everything down**: as East Asians are very numerous, they usually repeat everything to make sure that they have understood. After a telephone meeting, you should write down the information that was said. After a face-to-face meeting, you should also write a few lines and send them back to your Chinese partners to make sure both of you are on the same page.
- **Do not take anything personally, even if East Asian people try to scam you**: at the end of the day, their job is to do business, and they expect to meet people like them; they are not necessarily bad people.
- **Remain nice and smile**: it is important to avoid getting angry and to say things calmly with Asian people, even when you do not agree with them.
- **Learn a few words of the language**: it makes Asian people happy to see that you are interested in their culture.
- **Never speak about death**: it is a taboo subject in East Asia.

5.3. Discussion

After presenting the results of the online questionnaires and the interview, it seems relevant to have a section dedicated to a broader discussion of the findings. A lot of information was conveyed from the testimonies of the practical part, sometimes similar and sometimes different, which means that what will be presented in the following lines are better defined as **trends** determined from the average answers of the participants.

* Concepts

In the theoretical part of the dissertation, several specific concepts of China, Japan, and South Korea were introduced and detailed. The discussion that followed Chapter 2 argued that most of these concepts originate from the major influence of Confucianism in East Asia, and the hypothesis that these concepts are likely to clash with Western cultures was formulated. After collecting the data from the concept-related sections in the online questionnaires, the following summary chart allows us to compare the results obtained (cf. Table 90).

	Knowledge of the concept (yes/no)	Impact (most selected number)	Factor of culture shock for the participants (yes/no)	Factor of culture shock for others (most frequently selected number)
CHINA				
Guanxi	Yes (84.2%)	4 (41.2%)	No (83.3%)	4 (35.3%)
Mianzi/Lian	Yes (82.2%)	4/5 (41.2%)	Yes/No (47.1% for both)	5 (41.2%)
Jun-Zi Orientation	No (63.2%)	Some values (36.4%) All values (27.3%)	No (81.8%) **Yes (0.0%)**	3 (41.7%)
JAPAN				
Haragei	Yes (69.4%)	4 (44.1%)	No (59.5%)	5 (28.6%)
Harmony/Wa	Yes (93.9%)	4 (39.1%)	No (63.3%)	4 (26.5%)
Tatemae/Honne	Yes (98%)	5 (41.7%)	Yes/No (42.9% for both)	5 (44.9%)
Ringi Seido	Yes (63.3%)	Not used (44.9%) Used (36.7)	Yes (57.1%)	4 (43.9%)
Nemawashi	Yes (63.3%)	4 (43.8%)	No (83.3%)	3 (31.7%)
Kuuki	Yes (83.8%)	3/4/5 (29.5%)	No (71.1%)	4/5 (22.7%) **1 (20.5%)**
Giri	Yes (85.7%)	3 (31%)	No (70.5%)	3/4 (24.4%)
SOUTH KOREA				
Kibun	Yes (90.9%)	4 (50%) 3 (40%)	No (63.6%)	3 (30%) 4/5 (20%)
Nunchi	Yes (81.8%)	3 (55.6%)	No (63.6%)	4 (40%)
Inhwa/Harmony	Yes (72.7%)	3 (37.5%)	No (54.5%)	3/4 (26.4%)

Table 90: *Summary table of the concept-related results in the three questionnaires*

The results presented in the summary chart reveal that most of the East Asian concepts are known to the participants regardless of the questionnaire, with the exception of *Jun-zi orientation* for China, which is known by less than half of the survey's participants. The

concepts are usually characterised as moderately to highly present in the participants' workplaces; the most frequent ones being *Mianzi/Lian* for China, *Tatemae/Honne* for Japan, and *Kibun* for South Korea. Regarding their intercultural aspect, most of the concepts did not represent a factor of culture shock for a majority of the participants, except for *Mianzi/Lian* (its "yes" percentage being equal to its "no" one), *Tatemae/Honne* (same as for *Mianzi/Lian*) and *Ringi Seido*. If we draw a parallel with Mr Lidarssi's testimony, it can be argued that *Ringi Seido* tends to trigger culture shock in Western business expatriates because of the huge amount of time and the great number of people that it implies, which ultimately brings frustration and a loss of profit.

Interestingly, most of the concepts are on average rated as "likely to become a factor of culture shock for future Western expatriates", even when the respondents themselves did not experience any culture shock because of them. This tendency to underestimate other Western business expatriates' intercultural skills could perhaps be explained by the average profile of the participants: as many of them can speak the language of the country and have already worked a few years in East Asia, they could think that future Western expatriates will be less knowledgeable than themselves and thus more likely to experience culture shock. Some of these results should nevertheless be taken with caution, as certain trends were hardly established (see for example the results of Kuuki in the fourth column of the summary table), or that the number of answers was not sufficient to be truly representative of reality (cf. Questionnaire on South Korea).

* **Reasons that explain the experience (or lack of experience) of culture shock**

Although many of the East Asian concepts are on average not considered factors of culture shock for the participants, it is still interesting to know the reasons why. In most cases, these participants mention similarities of the concepts with their own culture, prior knowledge of the concepts, or even the fact that there is "just a need to adapt", suggesting that one can easily get used to the East Asian concepts. By contrast, those who experienced culture shock because of one or multiple specific concepts of East Asia frequently highlight differences with their culture of origin, opposition with certain of their values, or even a sense of frustration, hypocrisy, or uselessness.

* **Negotiating strategy (China)**

In the theoretical part of the thesis, four negotiating strategies of China were introduced: Win-Win, Win-Lose, Cooperative Egoism and Concessive Negotiation. According to Zhao's article (2000), the Win-Win and Cooperative Egoism strategies are advised for intercultural business, while Win-Lose and Concessive Negotiation are not. It should nevertheless be recalled that some win-win advocators are strongly opposed to Cooperative Egoism, as the latter would allegedly prevent the two parties from creating a long-term harmonious relationship. From the data gathered in the surveys, it can be observed that the most frequently selected Chinese negotiating strategy is Cooperative Egoism (chosen by 41.2% of the participants), followed by the Win-Win strategy (selected by 23.5% of the participants). Dr Lidarssi's testimony also supports these results, as he mentioned the fact that the Chinese are usually cooperating (in the story told, by reducing their price) while secretly trying to earn more than their partners. This, however, does not seem to shock Mr Lidarssi, and the participants of the questionnaire are equally rarely surprised by the strategy, claiming that "people are people", or that "it's the same everywhere".

The "long-term harmonious relationship" that is promoted by the Win-Win strategy while also representing a crucial element of Chinese culture (according to the theory) is thus not necessarily fundamental in Chinese business. It does not mean that developing relationships is not important for the Chinese, but rather that, like all businesspeople, earning money comes first.

* **Intercultural experience**

As culture shock cannot only be explained by concepts, the participants of the surveys were asked to give further information about their intercultural experiences in East Asia. The data collected indicate that the participants were on average often faced with culture shock when they first worked in East Asia. The reasons for experiencing culture shock are various: in addition to the language barrier, problems of nonverbal communication and unknown concepts and traditions, several issues are mentioned, which can be grouped into three types:

- **Societal**: profound racism, cultural aspects related to Bousai, the intermingling of professional and personal life, seating arrangements in rooms and taxis.
- **Professional**: work hours, complicated hierarchy, corruption, slow decision-making, institutional customs (emphasis on following a manual rather than more

efficient/helpful processes), favour-based working culture, women being asked if they want to have children during interviews, different relationships between employees and management.

- **Individual**: small habits not mentioned in the questionnaires, unrealistic expectations, indirect communication, different ways of processing/thinking, passive attitude.

∗ Training

In Chapter 3, the problematic lack of real intercultural training for students of business communication and business travellers was highlighted, and a model of cross-cultural training was introduced and explained. From the data gathered in the surveys, it can be observed that most of the participants did not benefit from any sort of cross-cultural training before they arrived in East Asia. Nevertheless, when they did, the formations were very diverse and not necessarily related to a "well-structured" program: some of the participants took advantage of the knowledge of foreign friends, while others researched on their own. Overall, the most frequently mentioned training courses are linked to studies and business corporations. In some way, Dr Terry Lidarssi also received cross-cultural training before doing business in East Asia, as the 11 years he spent in China combined with his doctorate in Chinese medicine made him very much aware of many Chinese habits and cultural aspects of the East Asian country. Most of those "trained" participants usually comment that their training was helpful, even though some add that it does not prevent culture shock and that knowledge comes with experience.

∗ Advice

Both in the interview and in the online questionnaires, advice for future businesspeople working in East Asia was asked to the participants. The most frequently mentioned ideas are to learn the language of the country and to study its culture. Behavioural advice (such as keeping an open mind, observing before reacting, or even expecting to be treated differently) is also often referred to. Furthermore, information from the interview with Terry Lidarssi can be added: the CEO of Hauliga Laboratories insists on travelling without preconceptions, not relying on what the media or other people may say about the country, as well as remaining nice in all circumstances.

CONCLUSION

By analysing East Asian cultural aspects that are supposedly discordant with the characteristics of Western cultures and measuring their impact in Western businesspeople's workplaces thanks to more pragmatic data, this dissertation was written with the aim of answering two final questions:

- *To what extent do Western businesspeople experience culture shock in the East Asian workplace? What are common factors of culture shock experienced by Western businesspeople in the East Asian workplace?*
- *What are the strategies that can be implemented in order to help these workers deal with culture shock?*

Regarding my first research question, it can be argued that Western businesspeople generally do face culture shock in East Asia, although the causes are diverse and not necessarily related to the specific concepts detailed in the theoretical part of the dissertation. As much as some concepts such as *Nemawashi* for Japan are hardly described as factors of culture shock by the participants of the online surveys, some others are more easily deemed as "problematic" and culturally shocking. For China, *Face* (Mianzi/Lian) seems to be the most surprising cultural aspect for Western business workers. As embarrassing someone is a particularly sensitive issue in China, the strategies that are used to avoid losing one's *face* can often be characterised as "extreme" by Westerners and lead to illogical decisions and frustration at work. *Face* also raises the problem of indirect communication, which is often used by East Asian workers to avoid disrespecting others, but which can paradoxically do more harm than good when initiated with Western business workers: as a "no" is not clearly stated, people belonging to "straightforward" cultures tend to think that it means "yes", when it is actually not the case at all. As Dr Lidarssi points out in his testimony, this behaviour is likely to cause misunderstandings as well as false expectations, which ultimately bring a series of problems, whether professional or relational.

In Japan, aspects related to *Face* and *Indirect communication* are also the most culturally shocking to Western businesspeople, taking this time the form of *Tatemae/Honne* and *Haragei*. As in the case of China, these two concepts are intrinsically linked to preserving harmony within one's group, but they can be interpreted differently when used with Western workers, most of which are coming from individualistic cultures. The results of the questionnaire about Japan reveal that *Tatemae/Honne* is often perceived as dishonest and

hypocritical, while *Haragei* is seen as a cause of confusion. In addition to these two aspects, *Ringi Seido* is very much criticised by Western business workers, as its complicated hierarchy implies long processes and a disproportionate number of people, frequently characterised as "useless" by the survey's participants. The East Asian focus on harmony is also present in South Korea and represents the most culturally shocking concept for Western businesspeople working in the country, some of whom mention the problems of communication and even corruption that it can involve. Overall, it can be argued that the collectivist aspect of East Asian countries and the need to preserve harmony at all costs (for example, by using indirect communication, not showing too many emotions, or gathering everyone's opinion before making a decision) shape part of the attitude and the values of East Asian workers that are likely to trigger culture shock in Western business workers, as the latter belong to a culture in which all these "precautions" are not needed.

Apart from the concepts linked to collectivism, Western workers can experience culture shock because of other aspects of East Asian societies, such as the language barrier, complicated rules to follow, deep racism within society, harsh working conditions, institutional customs, small habits of East Asians, and so on. Western workers can thus potentially experience culture shock on many different levels, but ways to prevent it do exist.

In answer to my second research question, several strategies can be implemented to help Western workers deal with culture shock, though it should be stressed that the best way to avoid cultural problems mainly comes from preparation: in other words, **training**. As mentioned above, many East Asian concepts are on average not considered factors of culture shock by the participants of the surveys. When asked the reason why, the two most common ideas are that the concepts are specific to East Asia, or that the respondents already knew about them before they arrived in the country. This second answer thus directly suggests that preparation prevents culture shock.

In Chapter 3, Johnson et al.'s model on cross-cultural competence was presented to give a general idea of how intercultural skills can be acquired, but no courses following this theory were mentioned. The data of the surveys show that Western businesspeople can use different means to get culturally trained, whether their formation comes from education, work, personal research or simply by speaking to a person belonging to the target culture. The key is to be aware of the cultural differences that one is likely to face in the foreign environment. Besides

proper preparation, advice linked to personality traits or behaviour is often given by the participants of the surveys: among them, “keeping an open mind” seems to be the most popular idea, and is also supported by Terry Lidarssi’s testimony, as he strongly stresses the importance to travel without preconceptions. To quote Hauliga’s CEO: “all cultures are different, but it does not mean that one is better than another”. Since the language barrier is also frequently considered a factor of culture shock, a lot of participants highlight the need to learn at least a few words of the language of the country. As explained earlier in the dissertation, learning a language is not only about absorbing words and a set of rules, but also diving into a new culture, whose aspects and traditions become better understood once one has a good command of its language. In addition, it is often a source of admiration for native speakers, who are happy to see the efforts that foreign workers make to learn their culture.

Upon finishing this conclusion, it seems relevant to address some of the limitations of this work. Although three East Asian countries were analysed in the framework of the thesis, the theoretical part on South Korea was significantly smaller than that of its two neighbours, and its questionnaire also obtained a lower number of participants, making it difficult to indicate representative trends linked to culture shock. The concepts mentioned in the theoretical part were likewise limited, and much more specific aspects of China, Japan and South Korea that are likely to trigger culture shock could potentially be found. Another problem was the very broad and confusing meaning of the word “Western”: even though specific parts of the world were targeted for the respondents of the surveys, these regions are still numerous and likely to differ from one another. For example, people from one particular Western country might be less likely to experience culture shock in East Asia thanks to the cultural values that are promoted in this country. Further research focusing on a specific Western region or on other East Asian concepts could thus be considered as a way to bring valuable new information to the literature on culture shock and intercultural communication.

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UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN
Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres
Place Blaise Pascal, 1 bte L3.03.11, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique | **www.uclouvain.be/fial**