A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Compliance Gaining:

China, Japan, and the United States*

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Abstract

The present study utilizes facework theory to integrate the compliance gaining and conflict management perspectives in understanding cross-cultural differences in interpersonal disagreements. Based on the facework dimensions of directness/indirectness and individual/group orientation, a questionnaire containing four different compliance gaining strategies was created for each of three interpersonal conflict situations. Respondents from the U.S., Japan, and the People's Republic of China completed a questionnaire designed to identify their compliance gaining preferences along the above-mentioned differences. Results reveal that U.S. respondents, in contrast to respondents from the PRC and Japan, preferred

direct strategies and those with individually-controlled sanctions. PRC respondents preferred indirect strategies and those with sanctions controlled by a group. Japanese respondents preferred a complex profile of strategies. Results are discussed in terms of understanding cultural variance, reconceptualizing the enactment of individualism and collectivism, and utilizing facework theory to understand cross-cultural differences in compliance gaining.

As global interconnections increase, we daily encounter situations requiring interaction with others who are culturally different from ourselves. The scripts we have written for our interactions often do not play well in such settings. Since their values, norms, rules, and interaction styles differ from our own, we are uncertain about how to most effectively play our roles in such encounters. We struggle to understand how to best communicate in intercultural situations.

One such situation, occurring with increasing frequency, is interpersonal persuasion. We often encounter interpersonal situations in which another person says or does something inconsistent with our desires. We may feel a need to communicate with that other person in order to resolve that inconsistency. Whether the situation is framed as one calling for compliance-gaining or one calling for conflict management, cultural differences could influence appropriate communication patterns.

A number of researchers have begun to investigate cross-cultural differences in compliance gaining. Several studies have sought to identify cross-cultural differences in strategy selection (e.g., Blickhan, Glance, & McBain 1988; Burgoon, Dillard, Doran, & Miller 1982; Miller, Reynolds, & Cambra 1983; Neuliep & Hazelton 1986; Shatzer, Funkhouser, & Hesse 1984). These investigations have identified a number of important differences in the strategy preferences among members of varying cultures. For example, Neuliep and Hazelton (1985) compared the strategy selection of Japanese students (living in Japan) with North American students and found significant differences between the Japanese subjects and their North American counterparts on strategy preference. However such research is limited for at least two reasons. First, most of this research attempts to employ U.S. strategy typologies (most commonly that created by Marwell & Schmitt 1967) to other cultures. Like linguistic relativity in general, the categories employed by U.S. residents may not fit the experiences of the

residents of other cultures. Second, the studies are atheoretic on the cultural level. Rather than examining differences from a perspective which allows us to examine cultural differences (e.g., Hall 1976; high and low context), they are merely cross-country comparisons. Many studies addressing cultural issues, assess the nature of compliance gaining strategies within "public" forums (e.g., Bruschke & Wiseman 1992; Glenn, Witmeyer, & Stevenson 1977; Renz 1987). In particular these studies analyze the strategies employed in negotiations and debates in international, public forums and so may have limited applicability to interpersonal situations.

Research in conflict management has also explored cross-cultural comparisons. While some of this research has suffered from the problem of applying category schemes developed in the U.S. to other cultures, recent research has been sensitive to theories of cultural variance and has focused more on identifying distinctions based on cultural differences (e.g., Ma 1990a; Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b). Moreover, the recent application of facework theory to conflict management (Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b) allows the opportunity to study our inconsistency from a perspective that is less culturally biased. Facework theory likewise allows the integration of both the compliance gaining and conflict management paradigms to provide a broader level of understanding of cross-cultural responses to interpersonal inconsistencies. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between cultural variability and compliance gaining strategy use by applying facework theory to generate compliance gaining strategies. More specifically, our focus was on three compliance gaining situations and two facets of individualism versus collectivism (high/low context) in strategy selection based on facework theory: direct versus indirect requests for compliance, and self versus other as the locus of control for a request to comply.

Cultural Variability

A number of theories have been advanced to explain cultural variability (e.g., Hall 1976; Hofstede 1980). However, the dimension of individualism-collectivism is the primary basis upon which such differences have been studied (Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b and citations therein). In fact, Triandis (1990) suggests that the individualism-collectivism distinction is the most important dimension of cultural

difference in social behavior. Hui and Triandis (1986) note that collectivism reflects "the subordination of individual goals to the goals of the collective, and a sense of harmony, interdependence, and concern for others" (pp. 244-5).   On the other hand, individualism is "subordination of the goals of the collectivities to individual goals, and a sense of independence and lack of concern for others." Generally, "emphasis is placed on individuals' goals in individualistic cultures, while group goals have precedence over individuals' goals in collectivist cultures" (Gudykunst & Kim 1991 : 42).

Another distinction essential for our investigation is provided by Triandis (1990). He argues that in relation to social control, a person from an individualistic culture depends more on guilt than on shame and reflects contractual agreements. For the collectivist, "social control depends more on shame than on guilt and reflects moral considerations" and "values are social (e.g. duty, politeness, conformity to ingroup authorities)" (p. 59).   As a result, one would expect that members of individualistic cultures would emphasize that one is "owed" something (sanctions or social control emanating primarily from the requester) while members of collectivist cultures would utilize an appeal to more social values (and sanctions would be based more on the good of the group).

A second basis of cultural variance that has generated substantial research is Hall's (1976) concept of context.   In each culture, context provides a means for understanding that culture's communication.   Hall conceived of context as a continuum varying from high to low.   In high context cultures much of the meaning of a communication transaction is within the individual or embedded within the context while in low context cultures the meaning of a message must be explicitly verbally encoded (Hall 1976).   The United States is a relatively low context culture while most Asian cultures are relatively high context (Hall 1976).   The dimensions of individualism/collectivism and context are related.   That is, the predominant mode of communication in collective cultures is high context while the primary means of communication in individualistic cultures is low context (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988).   Thus, Gudykunst and Kim note, "members of low-context, individualistic cultures tend to communicate in a direct fashion, while the members of high-context, collectivistic cultures tend to communicate in an indirect fashion" (p. 45).   Consequently, we would expect members of a low context culture to approach our interpersonal inconsistency more directly than members of a high context culture.   Indeed, Ting-Toomey (1985) indicated that conflict in low

context cultures is characterized by direct, confrontational attitudes, explicit communication codes, and open, direct strategies. The orientation of conflict in high context cultures is marked by indirect, nonconfrontational attitudes, is relationship orientated, and utilizes ambiguous, indirect strategies.   Part of the need for indirectness in high context cultures is the need to protect one's own and the other's face during a disagreement. Open disagreement or confrontation will cause both sides to lose face (Ting-Toomey 1985).   Consequently, a consideration of the role of face in interpersonal disagreements seems essential.

Facework Theory

Face, as defined by Ting-Toomey (1988), is "a projected image of one's self in a relational situation. It is an identity that is conjointly defined by the participants in a setting" (p. 215).   The enactment of face has two primary dimensions: positive face needs and negative face needs. Positive face needs focus on preserving self-image, while negative face needs concern the protection of autonomy (Chen 1990/91).   Further, Ting-Toomey explains the relationship of face saving to cultural context and to conflict style. She notes that for persons in low context cultures (e.g., United States) direct modes of behavior are likely to be less threatening than in high context cultures. Specifically, in relation to face negotiation, Ting-Toomey suggests that conflict styles among people in low context cultures are characterized by negative face need, directness, dominating and controlling strategies, and a greater degree of solution-oriented conflict style than those of people from high context cultures. The person from a high context culture would most likely resort to strategies that emphasize positive face need, preserve other's face, are indirect, reflect smoothing strategies, and reflect an avoidance-oriented conflict style. As a result, we can assume that when a conflict arises, a person from a low context culture would employ more direct compliance gaining strategies than someone from a high context culture (p. 229).

Face can also be viewed as a factor in how persons from different cultural orientations manage conflict. Cole (1989) found, for example, that subjects from the United States conceptualize face as self-concern face-saving while subjects from Japan perceive face as concern with other and face-giving. More recently, Ting-Toomey *et al.* (1991b) developed both general and specific facework categories. This rigorous analysis of polite and impolite requests (drawn from across cultures) indicates that face

strategies can be classified into the general categories of individual/group orientation and directness/indirectness. And in testing Ting-Toomey's theory of conflict and face-negotiation, Ting-Toomey *et al.* (1991a) found that members of collectivist cultures indicated more concern for other-face than their individualistic counterparts and that members of individualistic cultures reported employing a more dominant style of conflict management than those persons from collectivist cultures.

Clearly then face should be an important component of compliance gaining. In cultures where face is differently conceptualized and differently negotiated, we would expect that different strategies would be employed for gaining compliance. Since individualistic cultures see the individual as the center of decision-making, we would expect face negotiation to involve compliance gaining strategies that are centered on the individual. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures where the group is the center of decision-making, we would expect face negotiation to involve compliance gaining strategies that are centered around the group. Further, since individualistic low context cultures generally employ more direct communication, we would anticipate that face negotiation would result in more direct compliance gaining strategies than in collectivistic high context cultures.

Both the People's Republic of China and Japan are collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988; Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b). However, collectivism is not a monolithic value-system which manifests itself in only one communication pattern. Further, collectivism has been conceptualized as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Extant data would suggest, for example, that the PRC is more collectivistic than is Japan (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey 1988; Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b). Consequently, we felt a comparison between the United States and both the PRC and Japan would be more appropriate than single country comparisons.   We thus posited four research questions:

1.   Are direct compliance gaining strategies more preferred in the U.S. than in the PRC or Japan?
2.   Are indirect compliance gaining strategies more preferred in the PRC or Japan than in the U.S.?
3.   Are individual-oriented compliance gaining strategies more preferred in the U.S. than in the PRC or Japan?
4.   Are group-oriented compliance gaining strategies more preferred in the PRC or Japan than in the U.S.?

Methods

Sample

A total of 501 respondents participated in this cross-cultural study comparing Chinese, Japanese, and U.S. cultures. The 137 Chinese respondents had an average age of 21.9 (SD = 2.6), 73.7% were female, and 62.0% were attending a major university in southeastern PRC (the remaining 38% were international students at a university in northern Japan).   The 241 U.S. respondents had an average age of 21.8 (SD = 4.2), 65.6% were female, 64.2% were Euro-American, all were born and raised in the U.S., and all were attending a major university in the western U.S. The 123 Japanese respondents had an average age of 19.7 (SD = 2.5), 73.2% were female, and all were attending a major university in northern Japan.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to test respondents' likelihood of using various message strategies in resolving potential conflict situations involving themselves and their roommates. Two of the major criteria used in developing the conflict situations were that the problematic nature of the situation be fairly common and that it should be interpersonal in nature (as opposed to political, racial, sexual, etc.). After independent consultation with students from the PRC, Japan, and the U.S., three situations arose meeting these two criteria.   As worded in the English version of the questionnaire the three situations were as follows:

> You loaned your roommate some money a few weeks ago.   Your roommate said the loan would be repaid over a week ago and you need the money to make an important purchase for school.
>
> Your roommate is very messy and rarely helps in cleaning up your residence. This has become a significant problem since you have spent a lot of your time cleaning up messes instead of studying for your courses.
>
> You are trying to study for an important examination.   Unfortunately, your roommate is making so much noise that it is

very difficult to study.   You wish to have the roommate be more quiet.

Hereafter, the situations will be referred to as the unpaid loan, messy roommate, and noisy roommate situations, respectively.

    The second task in constructing the questionnaire was to develop compliance gaining messages that reflected the individualism-collectivism (I-C) dimension distinguishing the U.S. from the Japanese and Chinese cultures.   Using Ting-Toomey *et al.'s* (1991b) taxonomy of facework strategies, we attempted to develop strategies which reflected a direct vs. indirect and an individual vs. group orientation.   While Ting-Toomey *et al.* examined the individual vs. group orientation in terms of whose face was threatened, we operationalized this as locus of control since we were examining compliance gaining.   Further, Ting-Toomey *et al.'s* taxonomy included several subcategories of direct/indirect and individual/group (i.e., positive, negative, neutral, explicit, implicit).   Since we were focusing on these categories, we held the subcategories constant.   The strategies for each situation are identified below.   Each first strategy is a direct neutral.   Each second strategy is an indirect neutral.   Each third strategy is an individual explicit direct negative.   Each fourth strategy is a group explicit direct negative.

Unpaid Loan Situation

I would directly request that my roommate return my money.
I'd hint that I needed the money to buy something for school.
I'd say "If you don't repay me now, I will never loan you any money again."
I'd say "If you do not repay me now, everyone will know you are irresponsible."

Messy Roommate Situation

I'd say "You have made a mess of this place, clean it up."
I would hint that our residence is messy and that it needs cleaning.
I'd say "If you do not clean up after yourself, I am going to find a new roommate."
I'd say "If you do not clean up after yourself, we will be embarrassed when others come to visit us."

<u>Noisy Roommate Situation</u>

> I'd say "You are making too much noise.   Please be quiet."
> I'd hint that I need to study and would like for it to be more quiet.
> I'd say "If you don't quiet down, I'll be as noisy as possible when you are trying to study."
> I'd say "Your noisiness shows a lack of consideration for others."

The likelihood of using each of the four strategies for the three situations was rated on a four-point scale, where 1 = definitely would not use, 2 = probably would not use, 3 = probably would use, and 4 = definitely would use. It was hypothesized that use of directness and self control of sanctions would be more prevalent in individualistic cultures, while indirectness and other control of sanctions would be more prevalent in collectivistic cultures (e.g., PRC and Japan).

The Chinese version of the questionnaire was translated by a graduate student from the PRC who was in her third year of study in the U.S. and was felt to be bi-lingual and bi-cultural. The Japanese version of the questionnaire was translated from English by one of the authors, who is Japanese and has had several years of study in the U.S..   Both translations were then independently back-translated to English by two other bi-lingual and bi-cultural individuals. The results of the back-translations suggested that the Chinese and Japanese versions were equivalent to the English version.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance of the respondents' likelihood of using the 12 compliance gaining messages for the three situations revealed a significant effect for culture ($F[2/486] = 24.8$, $p < .0001$, Pillais criterion = .77).   Separate analyses of variance were computed for the 12 likelihood-of-use measures. As reflected in Table 1, the results of the ANOVAs were quite variable, especially across the three compliance situations.

For the unpaid loan situation, there were significant differences for culture on all four of the messages: directness ($F[2/486] = 23.2$, $p < .0001$; U.S. mean = 2.92, Japan mean = 2.92, PRC mean = 2.26), hinting ($F[2/486] = 53.3$, $p < .0001$; PRC mean = 3.39, U.S. mean = 3.28, Japan mean = 2.47), self control of sanctions ($F[2/486] = 17.7$, $p < .0001$; Japan mean = 1.64, U.S. mean = 1.58,

PRC mean = 1.16), and other control of sanctions (F[2/486] = 14.1, p < .0001; Japan mean = 1.63, PRC mean = 1.31, U.S. mean = 1.24).

For the noisy roommate situation, the likelihoods of using the four messages differed due to culture: directness (F[2/486] = 7.2, p < .0008; Japan mean = 2.77, PRC mean = 2.39, U.S. mean = 2.37), hinting (F[2/486] = 40.8, p < .0001; PRC mean = 3.39, U.S. mean = 3.38, Japan mean = 2.62), self control of sanctions (F[2/486] = 31.0, p < .0001; U.S. mean = 1.78, Japan mean = 1.59, PRC mean = 1.17), and other control of sanctions (F[2/486] = 16.9, p < .0001; PRC mean = 3.02, Japan mean = 2.68, U.S. mean = 2.43).

As can be seen in Table 1, for the messy roommate situation, there were three significant differences in message usage due to culture: directness (F[2/486] = 9.3, p < .0001; U.S. mean = 3.18, Japan mean = 3.02, PRC mean = 2.73), hinting (F[2/486] = 53.3, p < .0001; PRC mean = 3.42, U.S. mean = 3.40, Japan mean = 2.55), and other control of sanctions (F[2/486] = 83.3, p < .0001; PRC mean = 3.00, U.S. mean = 2.08, Japan mean = 1.58).

Many of the above significant effects were in the predicted direction of individualism and collectivism. More specifically, for those differences that proved significant, U.S. respondents tended to express higher likelihoods of using directness and self-control of sanctions than their Chinese and Japanese respondents. Also, the Chinese and Japanese respondents were more likely to use other-control of sanctions than their U.S. counterparts. However, for the hinting strategy, as opposed to what we had expected, members of the individualistic culture–i.e., the U.S.–were more likely to use this indirect strategy than their Japanese counterparts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between cultural variability and compliance-gaining strategy use. We began with the expectations that individualistic cultures would use more direct and self-oriented sanctions in compliance strategies while members of collectivistic cultures would use less direct and more other-oriented sanctions in compliance gaining strategies. Our results did not completely support these expectations.

The style of communication in collective high context cultures is typically indirect. Consequently, we expected to find that members of such cultures would be more likely to use indirect requests to gain compliance. Conversely, the communication style of individualistic low context cultures

is generally more direct and should result in more direct requests to gain compliance. Our results demonstrated that in all three situations, respondents from the PRC least preferred the direct strategies. This is consistent with the notion of preserving face essential in high context cultures since direct strategies tend to be an affront to positive face. However, in two of the three situations, direct strategies were equally preferred by U.S. and Japanese respondents and in the third situation, the Japanese respondents most preferred the direct strategy. Several factors might explain this difference. First, it may be that the PRC is significantly more collectivistic than Japan. Indeed, Hofstede's data reveal Japan to be only moderately collective (1980). Thus, the value of indirectness may be less significant to Japanese respondents. Second, the choice of strategy selection may be highly situation dependent. That is, because a wide variety of behaviors is tolerated in the U.S. while less deviance is tolerated in Japan, gaining compliance may be less important to U.S. respondents in these situations than it is to Japanese respondents. Japanese respondents may feel the need to be direct because the need for compliance is so high. U.S. respondents may be direct because it is their traditional style but still view the situation as sufficiently allowing of deviation not to demand even more direct communication styles.

These results are even more puzzling when juxtaposed against the hinting strategies. In all three situations, hinting was most preferred by U.S. and PRC respondents and least preferred by Japanese respondents. This may further support the notion that in these situations, deviance is not tolerable to Japanese respondents so hinting is viewed as an ineffective strategy. However, since hinting is a typically indirect strategy, it is viewed as appropriate by the highly collective Chinese. Why would U.S. respondents then use hinting? It may again be that these situations are not sufficiently important to demand more direct strategies for U.S. respondents.

Although the above stated reasons could explain our results, we think a better explanation lies in a reconceptualization of the concepts of individualism-collectivism. Extant literature suggests this represents a single continuum from individualistic to collectivistic. Were this the case, neither individualism nor collectivism would be expected to exert a significant influence on Japanese respondents since their position, by Hofstede's data, is near the center. However, our data suggest that the Japanese sometimes act in a fashion consistent with individualistic behavior and sometimes behave consistent with collectivistic norms. This

suggests that individualism and collectivism are actually two separate continua that may ebb and flow in their significance in influencing communication practices.   Especially in cultures in transition, such as Japan, this vacillation on some occasions gives preeminence to individualistic behavior and on others collectivistic behavior (see Katriel [1991] for a discussion of such changes in Israel).

Our results are thus partially consistent with prior literature which found distinctions in strategy choice between collective and individual cultures (Ting-Toomey *et al.* 1991b) and suggest that Ting-Toomey *et al.'s* (1991b) taxonomy of facework strategies may be appropriately applicable to help to understand cross-cultural differences in compliance gaining.   However, clearly the distinction is not so simplistic as collectivists use indirect strategies while individualists use direct strategies. While the general principle may be indirectness in high context cultures and directness in low context cultures, situational factors may alter this propensity.   Ma (1990b) likewise failed to find that North Americans were always more explicit than Chinese in conflict situations. Ma suggests that this inconsistency may be created by different types of relationships as well as a "natural expression of their feelings resolved from various considerations" (p. 149).   Since the nature of our relationships was held constant, this cannot completely explain our results. Rather, we believe a better explanation is that situational norms (as well as cultural values) influence strategy choice. Future research should further explore this phenomenon.   Future research examining the use of direct versus indirect strategies needs to more deeply examine the reasons why strategies are selected.   Such research should seek to measure the importance of the situation to the persuader and thus gauge the need for compliance.   Such research might more fruitfully examine preferred strategy selection by allowing respondents to identify preferred strategies with open-ended, rather than closed-ended questions.   While this would vastly increase the complexity of the research design, it might be more likely to yield a clearer understanding of preferred choices.

Our second concern was whether individualism/collectivism would affect the preference for sanction source.   We expected that individualistic cultures would be more likely to choose sanctions threatened by the compliance seeker: a high self or individualistic focus.   Further, collective cultures would prefer a group focus.   Our results also partially support this distinction.   In two of the three situations, respondents from the PRC least preferred strategies with individual sanctions. In two of the three

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situations, U.S. respondents least preferred sanctions which were group-based. While in one situation the Japanese respondents least preferred other-based sanctions, in the other two situations they preferred such sanctions significantly more than U.S. respondents. This generally supports the viability and application of the Ting-Toomey *et al.* taxonomy to examining cross-cultural variances in compliance gaining. Ting-Toomey *et al.* (1991b) likewise found some differences in the same direction: U.S. respondents tended to maintain a higher self-face concern than Korean residents. This indicates, though, that the distinction is not so simplistic as collectivists always prefer other-controlled sanctions while individualists always prefer self-controlled sanctions. This is further support for the vacillating effects of both individualism and collectivism in Japanese society (see also, Ishii-Kuntz [1989] for a discussion of the changes in collectivistic and individualistic orientations in Japan).

While our results do appear to support the influence of cultural variability on compliance-gaining strategies and the application of the Ting-Toomey *et al.* taxonomy to study such differences, much remains to be discovered. First, our results are limited by situational contexts in which compliance was sought. These were relatively minor roommate conflicts. Future research might seek to expand our findings by exploring conflicts of greater consequence as well as exploring conflicts between people of differing types of relationships. Second, our conclusions are limited by the fact that we compare only three cultures. Data from other cultures should be gathered to further explore the influence of varying degrees of context on strategy choice. In addition, future research might also further explore the Ting-Toomey *et al.* (1991b) model by varying both the explicitness and direction of the sanction.

Our research supports the application of facework theory as a means of integration of compliance gaining and conflict management perspectives in understanding cross-cultural differences in interpersonal disagreements.   It likewise expands our understanding of such differences by exploring the influence of cultural variance on strategy choice. It provides a basis for future exploration of the means of achieving effective communication in the global village.

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TABLE 1
Likelihood of Use of Strategies by Culture

	Means				
	USA	Japan	PRC	F	p
Unpaid Loan Situation					
Directness	2.92a*	2.92a	2.26b	23.2	.0001
Self-Control of Sanction	1.58a	1.64a	1.16b	17.7	.0001
Hinting	3.28a	2.47b	3.39a	53.3	.0001
Other-Control of Sanction	1.24a	1.63b	1.31a	14.1	.0001
Messy Roommate Situation					
Directness	2.37a	2.77b	2.39a	7.2	.0008
Self-Control of Sanction	1.78a	1.59b	1.17c	31.0	.0001
Hinting	3.38a	2.62b	3.39a	40.8	.0001
Other-Control of Sanction	2.43a	2.68b	3.02c	16.9	.0001
Noisy Roommate Situation					
Directness	3.18a	3.02a	2.73b	9.3	.0001
Self-Control of Sanction	1.54a	1.49a	1.46a	.4	n.s.
Hinting	3.40a	2.55b	3.42a	53.3	.0001
Other-Control of Sanction	2.08a	1.58b	3.00c	83.3	.0001

*Same-lettered means indicate no significant difference;
different-lettered means indicate a significant difference.

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