

Cross-Cultural Communication: Interactions Based on Developing Culture

Lei Huang

Abstract:

Since the reform and opening-up policy of 1978, great changes have occurred in China: not only Chinese society changed, but also ideas, values, and behaviours of Chinese people. This results in changes of traditional Chinese values in cross-cultural communication. Against this background, the developing trend of communication between Chinese and Germans is the main question of LIU Yue's book "Kulturspezifisches" Kommunikationsverhalten? Eine empirische Untersuchung zu aktuellen Tendenzen in chinesisch-deutschen Begegnungen ('Culturally Specific' Communication Behaviour? An Empirical Study on Current Tendencies in Chinese-German Encounters). Through analysing current intercultural communication phenomena, she finds out the existing problems, such as misunderstandings between Chinese and Germans, and brings forward some methods for improvement, which contribute to successful cross-cultural communication between China and Germany, for example integrating cultural awareness into foreign language teaching.

How to cite:

Huang, Lei: „Cross-Cultural Communication: Interactions Based on Developing Culture [Review on: Liu, Yue: "Kulturspezifisches" Kommunikationsverhalten? Eine empirische Untersuchung zu aktuellen Tendenzen in chinesisch-deutschen Begegnungen. München: iudicium, 2010.]“. In: KULT_online 31 (2012).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2012.671>

© by the authors and by KULT_online

Cross-Cultural Communication: Interactions Based on Developing Culture

Lei Huang

LIU Yue: "Kulturspezifisches" Kommunikationsverhalten? Eine empirische Untersuchung zu aktuellen Tendenzen in chinesisch-deutschen Begegnungen. München: Iudicium, 2010. 264 pp., € 25. ISBN: 978-3-89129-980-7

The cultural exchange between China and Germany is an interaction between two core sub-cultures within eastern and western internal cultures, namely the exchange between the Teuton civilization of north European culture and the Hua Xia civilization of north Chinese culture, which has been arousing intense scholarly interest. In the last few years, the striking transformation of the world has opened new fields of inquiry for intercultural study, especially in China, with particular regard to Germany. Covering this topic and focusing mainly on the transformations and changes of Chinese thoughts and behaviour, the book "Kulturspezifisches" Kommunikationsverhalten? Eine empirische Untersuchung zu aktuellen Tendenzen in chinesisch-deutschen Begegnungen by LIU Yue is a significant contribution to this growing field of study.

The author takes the boom in exchanges between China and Germany from 1970 on as a starting point, and states a cognitive imbalance between Chinese and Germans during their communication and the consequent balance of culture shock. For instance, Chinese "face-saving" (Ding and Fluck, 2001, p. 94, Liu, p. 56) makes Germans scratch their heads, while German "Pünktlichkeit" (p. 71: "punctuality") sometimes confuses Chinese.

One of the main reasons for the cognitive imbalance, from the author's point of view, originates in the existence of prejudices and stereotypes, which tend to relate closely to personal experiences (usually negative) and misunderstandings of foreign culture. Based on Nagel's research (1996), unfortunately, these prejudices and stereotypes can not be eliminated by a direct communication with people from a foreign culture or a short stay in a/the foreign country (cf. p. 78).

In this context, the author focuses on the younger Chinese generation, born after the opening policy and growing up with the modernization and social development of the country. Assuming this generation has more experiences with intercultural communication than the previous generations in China, the author then analyses the younger generation in detail and finds the one-child policy and the influence of globalization as main causes. Of particular interest is the "cultural globalization" (p. 97), which has already influenced the younger generation since

the reform and opening-up policies of 1978. Therefore, LIU Yue's research question is: How would people change their cultural standards in order to allow more intercultural communication and personal exchange? Taking it a little further, to what cultural distance will future communication trends lead us?

Methodologically relying on empirical surveys with Chinese and German students, the author reveals the misconceptions Chinese and Germans have of each other before they interact and how these impressions change after their interaction. Some of the research results are very surprising, for instance 52.8 % of Chinese students consider the differences between Chinese and Germans to be slighter than they expected after they interacted with Germans personally while German students hold the opposite (cf. p. 175).

It is in the last two theoretical chapters that the author gropes for what can be regarded as reasons for the research results. On the one hand criticizing the one-sided knowledge of Germans and Chinese before they interact with each other in person, the author regards the outdated knowledge about China in Germany (cf. p. 204) and the ignorance of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching in China (cf. p. 207) as the main causes. On the other hand she recognizes that she made mistakes concerning questions referring to language factors. For instance, "whether the communication with Germans is successful or mutually understandable, depends on target language mastery" (p. 215), where she is underestimating the important role of culture differences (cf. p. 215) while overemphasizing the effect of language (cf. p. 218).

Through these considerations, the author brings forward some measures to improve the effect of intercultural trainings and to resolve the practical predicaments of the communication between Chinese and Germans, such as promoting communication in intercultural context by reconciling the negative influence of cultural differences (cf. p. 225). Furthermore, she insists that follow-up studies need to scrutinize the ways in which nonverbal communication could act on intercultural communication. In addition, it is necessary to strictly define the extent and boundaries of cultural strangers' influence (cf. p. 226) before developing the survey questions, which are also the research fields that she did not cover in her own book.

In conclusion, this book offers a culture-based discussion and a practice-based diagnosis that bears importance for promoting friendly exchanges between China and Germany. By glossing the raw data with tables and diagrams, the author's conclusions become easy to comprehend, which makes reading this book not tiresome at all. Although some of the final results are unexpected, it's no exaggeration to say, anyone working with intercultural communication, especially between China and Germany, should seek guidance from this book in their quest for the new starting point of correlation studies.