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Multicultural Experiences and Intercultural Communication

ANGELA K.-Y. LEUNG AND CHI-YUE CHIU[1]

As mentioned in Part II of this volume, culture consists of shared knowledge in the forms of societal norms, lay beliefs, values, practices, and routines. Through participating in culture and engaging in communication with other cultural members, people grasp the shared reality in their culture and use it as behavioral guides both when they communicate with people in their culture and when they interact with people from a different culture. Not surprisingly, the role of communication in cultural processes has been extensively discussed in the research literature. In contrast, how cultural *processes* affect communication has been relatively unexplored, although there is ample research on cultural differences in communication processes.

The goal of this chapter is to fill this gap by focusing on *how* multicultural experiences may impact intercultural communication. Drawing on the cultural competence model proposed by Chiu and Hong (2006), we contend that effective intercultural communication requires nuanced understanding of cultural differences and discriminative application of cultural knowledge to guide interactions in different cultural contexts. We further contend that multicultural experiences confer opportunities for intercultural learning. Thus, individuals with rich, multicultural experiences are expected to possess nuanced knowledge of cultural differences and be able to use such knowledge discriminatively to guide interactions in changing cultural contexts. In this chapter, we will discuss these contentions and review the pertinent supporting evidence. Finally, we will discuss how cultural identification and need for cognitive closure may moderate the effects of multicultural experiences on intercultural learning and discriminative

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application of cultural knowledge. To provide the context for these discussions, in the next section, we will briefly review the role of communication and intercultural communication in cultural processes.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CULTURAL PROCESSES

As discussed in Chapter 3, sharedness is an important aspect of culture; culture is made up of a set of meanings or mental representations that are shared (or at least perceived to be shared) among a group of interconnected individuals in a society (D'Andrade, 1987; Kashima, 2002; Wan et al., 2007). In a metaphorical illustration, Dan Sperber (1996) compared the evolution of culture to the occurrence of an epidemic. An epidemic occurs when there is a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a certain time. Likewise, when a knowledge representation is spread like a contagious virus to many human carriers in the community, the knowledge representation becomes a part of the culture.

Communication is a major channel through which cultural knowledge representations spread to others and become consensual knowledge in the culture. As Sperber (1996) put it, "those representations which are repeatedly communicated and minimally transformed in the process will end up belonging to the culture" (p. 88). The dynamic social impact theory offers an elaborate explanation of the role of communication in the evolution of culture-like spatial clusters of opinion (Latané, 1996; Latané & Bourgeois, 1996). According to this theory, through communication and social influence, opinions that were scattered spatially at the beginning will self-organize into culture-like spatial clusters of opinions. When people engage in social interactions, they tend to communicate with those who are physically close to them, such as those in the same neighborhood. Through this communicative process, people living in the same neighborhood will share similar opinions, which are different from those in other neighborhoods. Furthermore, within the same neighborhood, previously unrelated opinions will be assimilated into a stable conglomerate set of opinions that define the neighborhood.

When a conglomerate set of opinions is formed in a human group, the communication process will help stabilize it (Chiu, Leung, & Kwan, 2007). Kashima, Woolcock, and Kashima (2000) have proposed a connectionist model to account for the reproduction of conventional ideas in a society. According to this model, each cultural member is a unit in a network of connections. Serial communications take place when individuals receive

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information and communicate it to other individuals in the network. As reproductions are subject to memory decay and influence from preexisting schemata, some information may be transmitted but some may be distorted or lost in the process. In several experiments using a story reproduction paradigm, the researchers showed that stereotypical or conventionalized information has a higher chance than does nonstereotypical information to be retained and transmitted from one individual to another in a sequence of communication trials (Kashima, 2000; Lyons & Kashima, 2001, 2003). The connectionist model illustrates how cultural stability can be maintained through serial reproduction of communicative messages, which tend to incorporate conventionalized and widely distributed information and eliminate counterstereotypical information.

Against this theoretical context, intercultural communication plays a critical role in enriching and even transforming a culture. At a relatively superficial level, intercultural communication results in the importation of novel ideas from foreign cultures and hence provides the raw ideological materials to stimulate cultural change. Given that nonconventional ideas are unlikely to survive the serial communication test, however, most imported ideas from foreign cultures would not be retained in the culture.

At a deeper level, as we argue later in this chapter, successful communication requires sensitivity to distribution of ideas in the addressee's culture and customization of communicative messages and communication styles to the knowledge, preferences, beliefs, and values of the addressee's culture. Accordingly, individuals who are motivated to have successful intercultural communication will want to acquire nuanced understanding of the knowledge in the addressee's culture and be prepared to accommodate their communicative messages and communication style to the preferred mode and style of communication in the addressee's culture (see Chapter 12, this volume). From this perspective, intercultural communication could jump-start an intercultural learning process and create an incentive for reproducing otherwise novel and unconventional ideas and communicative styles from a foreign culture in serial communications. Such reproductions would occur primarily in intercultural contexts, at least in the individuals' early encounters with the foreign culture. Subsequently, as discussed in Chapter 12, the ideas that are often communicated in intercultural interactions may be incorporated into the communicators' multicultural identity. For this reason, aside from the practical benefits of improving intercultural understanding and quality of intercultural interactions, intercultural communication is a theoretically important phenomenon for understanding basic cultural processes.

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MAJOR OBSTACLES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Although successful intercultural interactions typically require effective intercultural communication, there are many cultural and psychological obstacles to effective intercultural communication. Some of these obstacles pertain to stable qualities of the individuals involved in intercultural communication. Others pertain to cultural differences in communication styles.

Person-Level Obstacles

For instance, people often feel anxious and distressed when interacting with people from a markedly different culture. People may experience feelings of ambivalence and culture shock during intercultural encounters (Hong, Wan, No, & Chiu, 2007). Thus, participation in intercultural communication requires some psychological preparation. Some people are less willing than others to get prepared to interact with people from other cultures (Chen & Isa, 2003). Kim (1997) used the term *preparedness* to refer to an individual difference in the potential to be adaptive to intercultural encounters. Compared to prepared individuals, individuals who are ill prepared to enter into an intercultural interaction experience more intense anxiety and psychological distress in intercultural encounters. They are also less willing to engage in cultural learning and less prepared to broaden their awareness of and reflect on the characteristics of diverse cultures.

Close-mindedness is another personal obstacle to effective intercultural communication. Individuals who are open to experience are those who are appreciative of new experiences and are receptive to a variety of perspectives and thoughts (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1997). People who are open to experience have a predisposition to learn from new cultural experiences and engage in intercultural interactions. In contrast, people with low levels of openness may find encountering foreign cultures to be overwhelming, shocking, and even threatening (Leung & Chiu, 2008). Thus, individuals who are not open to new experiences may appraise and experience intercultural encounters negatively. These individuals are not well prepared to enter intercultural communication.

Cultural Differences in Communication Styles

Even among individuals who are open and prepared to enter intercultural communication, communicating effectively with individuals from a

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different culture – particularly a culture with markedly different communication norms and styles – is difficult, because these individuals may not have sufficient knowledge of the dominant communication norms and styles in the interaction partners' culture.

Research on intercultural communication has revealed many cross-cultural differences in communication norms and styles. As an illustration, power distance is a major factor affecting interpersonal communication style (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985; Wish & Kaplan, 1977). For example, individuals who are assigned the role of a supervisor tend to use more confrontational conflict management techniques, whereas those who are assigned the role of a subordinate tend to use less controlling strategies (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). Cultures differ in the extent to which their members are sensitive to power or status distinctions in the communication context. Brew and Cairns (2004) showed that, compared to Westerners, East Asians are more responsive to the status distinction of the disputants when handling conflicts; they use a more indirect style when dealing with a superior than with a subordinate. Another study (Lee & Rogan, 1991) also found that Koreans become more confrontational in communication when they register an increase in their power and status relative to their communication partner, whereas Americans maintain the same communication style despite the change in their relative power or status.

Given the prevalence of cultural differences in communication norms and styles, a key predictor to effective intercultural communication is the extent to which communicators have at their disposal accurate knowledge regarding the communication norms and styles in their communication partner's culture. From this perspective, multicultural experiences, which confer opportunities to acquire such knowledge, should facilitate effective intercultural communication.

A COMMUNICATION MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

As an extension of their social competence model, Chiu and Hong (2006) have proposed a model of cultural competence. Whereas social competence refers to people's sensitivity to subtle cues about the psychological meanings of changing situations, as well as discriminative use of appropriate behavioral strategies in certain situations (Cheng, Chiu, Hong, & Cheung, 2001), cultural competence refers to people's sensitivity to the distribution of knowledge in a cultural group and their flexibility in switching the cultural lens and applying context-appropriate cultural knowledge to accomplish valued goals in intercultural interactions.

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Applying this model to intercultural communication, we posit that effective intercultural communication occurs when the communication partners (a) have nuanced understanding of the dominant preferences and norms in their own and their communication partner's culture, and (b) can flexibly and discriminatively apply such knowledge in intercultural communication in a culturally sensitive manner. Because shared knowledge of one's own and foreign culture(s) can be acquired through extensive experiences in the culture, through multicultural experiences individuals can acquire the pertinent cultural knowledge. Furthermore, multicultural experiences also confer opportunities for practicing discriminative use of cultural knowledge in intercultural communication. Thus, multicultural experiences should contribute to effective intercultural communication. We will review evidence for each of these propositions in this section.

Knowledge Estimation and Communication

A key assumption in the proposed model is that having refined knowledge of the shared preferences and norms in a certain culture is critical to effective communication with members in that culture. Consistent with this assumption, research has shown that, when communicating with others in the community, people retrieve from memory knowledge that is assumed to be shared in the community (Keysar, Barr, Balin, & Brauner, 2000). They would assess what information is mutually known and formulate a message based on the estimated common ground.

Indeed, people seem to possess remarkably accurate knowledge regarding what people in their community know and what they do not know. In one experiment, Fussell and Krauss (1992) had American college students view pictures of U.S. public figures (e.g., Woody Allen, George Bush). For each target, they rated how identifiable the target was, named the target if they could, and estimated the proportion of undergraduates from their university who could name the target. Participants were remarkably accurate in estimating the distribution of knowledge of the public figures among students at their own university. In follow-up studies, the same result was obtained when students were asked to estimate their peers' knowledge of other everyday objects (e.g., kitchen utensils, tools). In another study that used the same methodology (Lau, Chiu, & Hong, 2001), Hong Kong participants were asked to estimate other Hong Kong residents' knowledge of specific landmarks in Hong Kong, Macau, and New York City. To create an objective measure of the proportion of people who actually knew the landmarks, the participants were also asked to identify the landmarks. Again,

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the participants in this study were remarkably accurate in estimating the distribution of knowledge of the landmarks in their community.

Furthermore, people used their social knowledge to guide message generation. In the Fussell and Krauss (1992) study, participants were also asked to describe the public figures to an ingroup addressee so that the addressee could identify who the public figures were from the descriptions. Results showed that participants generated shorter or more succinct messages when they described public figures who were believed to be widely known in their culture than when they described public figures who were expected to be unfamiliar in the culture.

When people describe to an addressee the picture of a landmark that is assumed to be widely known in the community, they tend to generate concise descriptions. In fact, oftentimes, the speakers will mention the name of the landmark only (e.g., "This is the Statue of Liberty."). In the study by Lau and colleagues (2001), the Hong Kong Chinese participants were also asked to describe the landmarks to an ingroup addressee so that the addressee could identify from the descriptions what the landmarks were. Again, participants customized their messages according to their estimation of the addressee's knowledge of landmarks: They generated shorter descriptions for presumably well-known landmarks than for presumably unfamiliar ones. Furthermore, Isaacs and Clark (1987) found that, when American participants described New York City landmarks to an ingroup addressee, the participants were more likely to mention the name of the landmarks when these landmarks were famous (e.g., the Statue of Liberty) than when they were not (e.g., the General Grant Memorial). Consistent with this result, Lau and colleagues (2001) also reported that, when describing landmarks, the Hong Kong Chinese participants were more likely to mention the names of the landmarks when the landmarks were believed to be famous (vs. not famous) among Hong Kong people.

It should also be pointed out that, in the study by Lau and colleagues (2001), although descriptions of the well-known landmarks were relatively short, they were as communicative as the detailed descriptions of the unfamiliar landmarks. When a separate group of undergraduates from the same campus were asked to identify the landmarks described in each message, accuracy of decoding was equally high for the relatively short descriptions of the well-known landmarks and the relatively detailed descriptions of the unfamiliar ones.

Taken collectively, the evidence indicates that people have refined knowledge about the distribution of knowledge in their own culture and are able to use this knowledge to formulate communicative message for their

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addressee. They take knowledge of the addressee into account in message formulation and generate messages that contain sufficient information for effective communication of the intended referential meanings.

If individuals can acquire social knowledge through cultural immersion, individuals with extensive experiences in multiple cultures may possess nuanced knowledge of what people in different cultures know and do not know. These individuals may also be able to use knowledge about the pertinent culture to customize their message for addressees of different cultural backgrounds. From this perspective, multicultural experiences should be accompanied by relatively effective intercultural communications. We now turn to the theories and research evidence pertinent to these possibilities.

Multicultural Experiences and Intercultural Communication

Related Theories

Broadly speaking, intercultural communication happens when individuals from two cultures speak to or interact with each other. Through immersion in multiple cultures, multicultural individuals may acquire refined knowledge regarding what people in different cultures know, believe in, prefer, and value. If they customize the contents and styles of their communications based on their nuanced understanding of cultural differences in knowledge, beliefs, preferences, and values, they would be effective when communicating to people of different cultural backgrounds. Consistent with this idea, Wiseman (2002) contends that knowledge of and attitude toward other cultures are key contributors to effective intercultural communication. As Wiseman (2002) pointed out, "a knowledgeable communicator needs information about the people, the communicator rules, the context, and the normative expectations governing the interaction with the member of another culture" (p. 211).

Our idea is consistent with current theorizations of the effect of intercultural interactions. For instance, Chen and Isa (2003) contend that frequent interactions with people from a foreign culture confer opportunities for experiential cultural learning, which in turn should foster nuanced understanding of cultural differences. In her network approach to the study of intercultural communication, Kim (1986) suggested that people who have a culturally heterogeneous personal network tend to have high levels of intercultural communication adaptability, which is reflected in (a) the ability to acquire knowledge and discern meanings, (b) the tendencies to display appropriate emotions and to willingly accommodate to culturally appropriate practices, and (c) the ability to act flexibly and resourcefully

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in intercultural encounters. Multicultural individuals are likely to have culturally heterogeneous social networks (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), and hence should have many opportunities to engage in experiential cultural learning. Accordingly, these individuals should have developed a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences and should be effective in intercultural communication.

Also consistent with our view are the results from a cluster analysis study of the personal qualities of effective intercultural communicators carried out by Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005). That investigation revealed several qualities that are necessary for developing intercultural communication competence, two of which are knowledge and motivation. Specifically, competent intercultural communicators are other-centered and observant: They are sensitive and open to others and have good communication skills. More importantly, they have strong interest in and are well aware of cultural matters. Their prior cross-cultural experiences and non-ethnocentric global outlook also make it easier for them to learn the norms and practices in other cultures. In general, the qualities that favor the development of intercultural communication competence appear to be the same qualities characterizing multicultural individuals (Leung & Chiu, 2008).

Research Evidence

As discussed in Part II of this volume, cultures differ in the relative prevalence of domain-specific lay theories, preferences, and norms. For example, research has found clear cross-cultural differences in the relative popularity of different self-regulatory preferences (Lalwani, Shrum, & Chiu, 2009), conflict management style (Fu, Chiu, Morris, & Young, 2007), and negotiation strategies (Fu et al., 2007). In the next section, we will review research evidence that links multicultural experiences to nuanced understanding of cultural differences and addressee-centered customization of communicative strategies in intercultural interactions.

KNOWLEDGE ESTIMATION. In one study (Zou et al., 2009), the researchers asked American undergraduate students to indicate how they themselves would respond to the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins et al., 2001), which is a measure of two self-regulatory preferences. One of these preferences is promotion focus, or the tendency to be motivated by aspirations toward ideals; this motivational focus develops from a personal history of reaching personal ideals. The other preference is prevention focus, or the tendency to be motivated by fulfillment of duties or obligations; this motivational focus develops from a personal history of successfully avoiding

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social disapproval. Based on the responses of this group of participants, the researchers obtained the actual relative preferences of American undergraduates for promotion and prevention focus. In this study, American undergraduates had a slightly stronger preference for promotion focus over prevention focus.

Next, the researchers had undergraduate students from the United States, Hong Kong, and Beijing estimate how an average American college student would respond to the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire. Studies conducted at about the same time showed that, compared to Beijing Chinese undergraduates, Hong Kong Chinese undergraduates had more experience with American culture (Sui, Zhu, & Chiu, 2007). By comparing the estimated responses from the three groups against the actual responses from the American students, the investigators assessed how experiences with American culture are linked to accuracy in estimating American students' responses.

Not surprisingly, American students made highly accurate estimations of their peers' relative preference for promotion and prevention focus. Hong Kong Chinese students' estimations were not as accurate as those of American students, but were significantly more accurate than those of Beijing Chinese students, who tended to overestimate (by three times) American students' relative preference for promotion (vs. prevention).

In another study that used the same methodology (Leung, Chiu, & Hong, 2003), the investigators in the first part of the study compared bicultural Chinese Americans' and monocultural European Americans' estimations of how an average Chinese and an average European American would respond to the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins et al., 2001). American students had a greater preference for promotion focus than did the Chinese students. More importantly, Chinese Americans were accurate in estimating the American–Chinese difference in promotion focus, whereas European Americans erroneously believed that Chinese had a greater preference for promotion focus than did Americans. Taken together, the results suggest that extent of exposure to American culture is associated with accuracy in estimating American students' motivational preferences.

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION. Aside from having a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences, bicultural individuals are also more facile than are monocultural individuals at customizing their communications based on the cultural identity of their addressee. In the second part of the study by Leung and colleagues (2003), participants were asked to imagine that they worked for an international insurance company. Their task was

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to generate three arguments to persuade either a Chinese or an American client to sign up for an insurance plan. The client's cultural identity was embedded in a subtle manner in the client's personal profile presented to the participants. Results showed that Chinese Americans used more promotion-focused arguments to persuade the American client than they did the Chinese client, which was consistent with their estimation of a greater preference for promotion focus among Americans (vs. Chinese). In contrast, European Americans generated predominantly promotion-focused arguments for both the American and Chinese clients. This finding indicates that bicultural individuals are able to customize the contents of their persuasive communications based on the addressee's cultural identity.

DIRECTNESS IN COMMUNICATION. As another example of bicultural individuals' behavioral flexibility in communication, consider the Protestant Relational Ideology. This ideology prescribes direct communication and proscribes relational concerns and emotional detachment in work (vs. nonwork) settings (Sanchez-Burks, 2002; Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000). This ideology evolved from the beliefs and social practices of the Calvinist Protestants who were active in 17th- and 18th-century America (Weber, 1947), and is more widespread in Western cultures than in East Asian cultures. In a series of studies (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003), through assessing the occurrence of errors in decoding indirect messages presented in work or nonwork situations (Study 1) and by gathering self-report ratings on the extent of indirectness expressed toward coworkers and nonwork acquaintances (Study 2), the investigators showed that only Americans attended less to indirectness cues in work settings than in nonwork settings. In their last study, Thai-American bicultural managers were experimentally induced to switch their cultural frames by filling out either a Thai or an English version of the same survey. When assigned to complete the Thai version, participants, whose East Asian cultural knowledge was activated, displayed indirect communication style in both work and nonwork settings. When assigned to complete the English version, participants, whose Western cultural knowledge was activated, displayed less indirectness in work settings than in nonwork settings.

These findings revealed intricate differences between East Asians and Westerners in the preferred level of indirectness in communication. Nonetheless, Thai-American managers, as a result of their bicultural experiences, have nuanced knowledge of these cultural differences. Moreover, they can flexibly switch their communication pattern in response to the cultural and situational demands of the communication context.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION. Evidence for bicultural individuals' behavioral flexibility has also been reported outside the domain of intercultural communication. For example, Hong Kong Chinese, who are conversant in both Chinese and American cultures, preferred distribution of reward based on contribution more (an allocation favored by Americans) when they were primed with American culture (incidentally exposed to icons of American culture) than when they were primed with Chinese culture (incidentally exposed to icons of Chinese culture), and they preferred equal distribution to team members (an allocation favored by Chinese) when they were primed with Chinese (vs. American) culture (Fu et al., 2007). Hong Kong Chinese primed with Chinese (vs. American) culture also made more cooperative choices when they played the Prisoner's Dilemma game with ingroup members (Wong & Hong, 2005).

One well-documented cross-cultural difference in conflict management is the greater preference for direct confrontation with the disputant parties in Western culture and the greater preference for indirect or avoidance tactics in Eastern culture. That is, Westerners prefer using assertive or question-and-answer communication style to interrogate their disputant. In contrast, Easterners prefer using indirect tactics to avoid public acknowledgement of the dispute and thus save face for the parties involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Triandis, 1994; see also Chapter 11, this volume). Consistent with the idea that bicultural experience is associated with behavioral flexibility, Chan and Goto (2003) reported that Hong Kong Chinese are more likely to use inaction to resolve conflict (a relationship preserving strategy) when they deal with a Hong Kong Chinese disputant than when they deal with an American disputant, indicating that the strategy choice of bicultural Hong Kong Chinese depends on the negotiation partner's cultural identity.

Bicultural individuals' behavioral flexibility has also been observed among non-Asian bicultural individuals. For instance, whereas East Asian monocultural individuals indiscriminately prefer indirect conflict management styles more when negotiating with a superior than with a subordinate, bicultural Australian expatriates in East Asia are sensitive to the cultural identity of the disputant: They use more indirect styles when negotiating with an Asian than with a Westerner (Brew & Cairns, 2004).

These results show that bicultural experiences are associated with having nuanced understanding of cultural differences and flexibility in responding to specific demands for culturally appropriate behaviors in intercultural contexts. Across studies, bicultural individuals tend to flexibly tune their communicative messages to the preferred self-regulatory style of their client

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and to the preferred conflict resolution style of their disputant, taking into account the cultural identity of the interaction partner.

At this point, readers may wonder whether bicultural individuals' nuanced understanding of cultural differences and behavioral accommodation would lead to effective intercultural communication or interaction. Recent research evidence indicates that they would. First, research has consistently shown that, in intercultural communication, people like those who accommodate their communication style to the style of one's cultural group more than they like those who do not (Giles & Powesland, 1975). For example, in cross-cultural negotiation, Party A comes from a culture that favors indirect exchange of offers and counteroffers and Party B comes from a culture that favors direct negotiation strategy. A would like B more if B would accommodate his or her negotiation strategy to the indirect negotiation strategy favored by A than if B would not. There is also evidence that, among new immigrants, those who have acquired more nuanced knowledge of the values in the host culture report more harmonious relationships with people in the host culture as well as more efficacious goal pursuits (Li & Hong, 2001).

BOUNDARIES OF THE BENEFITS OF MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES

As discussed in Part III of this volume, culture serves self-identity and epistemic functions. Thus, when identity or epistemic needs are salient in the immediate context, rather than critically reflect on their cultural experiences and learn about a new culture, individuals in an intercultural encounter will feel an increased need to adhere to their own culture. Thus, although multicultural experience can lead to accrual of useful knowledge of cultural differences, which is a valuable cognitive asset in intercultural communication, these benefits would emerge only when the following conditions are met: (a) the intercultural boundary is not salient or is perceived to be malleable; and (b) the communicators are not pressured by their epistemic need to stick to their own cultural traditions.

Cultural Identification and Intercultural Boundary

Intercultural communication inevitably involves communication between people from different cultural groups. Thus, intercultural communication can be understood as a special form of intergroup communication. As such, factors that affect intergroup relations (e.g., social identity, power or status differential, perceived threat) should also affect the quality of intercultural communication.

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According to the social identity theory, people seek self-enhancement through associating the self with a positive group. For self-enhancement purpose, people also tend to focus on the perceived positive distinctiveness of the group with which they identify. As a consequence, they favor the ingroup over outgroup (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and exaggerate the positive qualities that uniquely define the ingroup and the negative qualities that distinguish the outgroup from the ingroup.

Individuals' social identity need and its attendant ingroup-favoring perceptual biases become particularly salient in the presence of identity threats (Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 2003). In one study, it was found that, when group identity was threatened, participants defended their threatened identity by evaluating more favorably the creativity of ingroup products and allocating more resources to ingroup members (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997). Such identity-driven biases would discourage individuals from engaging in critical reflections of their own culture or in intercultural learning. Indeed, research has consistently shown that cultural identity salience discourages accommodation to the speech characteristics of the outgroup culture in intercultural communication (Tong, Hong, Lee, & Chiu, 1999; see also Chapter 12 for an extensive discussion on how salience of cultural identity concerns could create intercultural tensions).

The negative effects of cultural identification on intercultural learning are particularly pronounced when people perceive the intergroup boundary to be discrete and impermeable. When the intergroup boundary is perceived to be impermeable, establishment of common ground through intergroup communication would seem difficult, if not impossible. A group may be viewed as an entity with impermeable boundaries because it is seen to possess some defining essence or perceived to be an agentic unit (Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004). Members of an *essentialized* group are believed to share inherently unalterable psychological attributes, and essence is often attributed to the group because its members possess the same physical characteristics (e.g., skin color, facial features). In contrast, members in an *agentic* group are perceived to pursue common goals, and agency is attributed to the group when its members display concerted group behaviors (e.g., display similar actions or behaviors; Ip, Chiu, & Wan, 2006).

A recent study (Yokota & Yuki, 2007) has examined the attendant intergroup emotions of these two different kinds of entitativity perceptions – perceptions of a collection of individuals as an entity with relatively discrete boundaries. This study found that encountering an essentialized outgroup (i.e., a group with shared physical attributes) might evoke fear of contamination – the fear that the outgroup will threaten the health and/or moral

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purity of the ingroup. Such fear would in turn evoke feelings of disgust and the tendency to avoid outgroup members to minimize the chance of contacting the physical and/or moral contaminants. In contrast, encountering an agentic outgroup (i.e., a group sharing similar behaviors) is likely to evoke the perception of an obstacle threat – the fear that the outgroup would pose a threat to the ingroup's safety. A perceived obstacle threat would in turn evoke anger as well as aggression toward the outgroup.

Given these findings, we expect that perceived threats from an outgroup culture and the negative emotions that accompany such perceptions would adversely affect intergroup communication. Consistent with this expectation, research on intercultural interaction shows that experiencing an outgroup as a threat to the purity and integrity of one's own culture could evoke nationalistic, exclusionary reactions toward the outgroup culture (Chiu & Cheng, 2007).

Need for Cognitive Closure

Time pressure evokes the need for cognitive closure or the need for firm answers; it reinforces reliance on established cultural norms that offer firm answers to otherwise ambiguous problems (Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Fu et al., 2007). Time pressure also evokes a sense of time urgency, which pushes people to pursue the dominant group goal in the immediate context when managing intercultural interactions.

Brew and Cairns (2004) studied the management of organizational conflicts among a group of Western expatriates and Asian host nationals in urgent (vs. nonurgent) situations. These investigators posit that the prevailing economic mentality at fast-paced corporate workplaces is efficiency, which is epitomized in the popular saying of "Time is money." Efficiency as the dominant organizational goal requires employees to resolve conflicts directly; otherwise more time would have to be spent if one seeks to negotiate diplomatically and to exert efforts in safeguarding each other's face. Thus, when required to solve organizational conflicts in urgent (vs. nonurgent) situations, Western expatriates and Asian host nationals reacted similarly by being frank and undiplomatic. When a potential conflict had not yet surfaced, however, time urgency actually heightened both groups' preference for avoidance strategies.

When the context of the conflict changes from corporate culture to national culture, time pressure should push individuals to adhere to the dominant norms in the national culture. Consistent with this expectation, Fu and colleagues (2007) found that Americans and East Asians showed

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conflict-settling preferences, information-seeking behaviors in disputes, and fairness judgment in reward allocation that are characteristic of their own culture only when the need for cognitive closure was high. Taken together, when the needs for social identification and firm answers are salient, individuals encountering a new culture tend to follow the dominant conventional norms in their own culture and are unlikely to engage in intercultural learning. As a consequence, they will forego opportunities to acquire nuanced knowledge of cross-cultural differences and practice behavioral flexibility.

Nevertheless, after individuals have acquired refined knowledge about a foreign culture, the effect of the need for cognitive closure would reverse because, relative to knowledge of one's own culture, knowledge of a foreign culture would now offer more valid behavioral guides in intercultural encounters. For example, when a Chinese businessperson has acquired refined knowledge of the behavioral norms in American culture, he or she would perceive knowledge of American culture to be more valid and useful behavioral guides than knowledge of Chinese culture when interacting with her American business partners. In this circumstance, if a higher need for cognitive closure fosters reliance on valid cultural knowledge, that higher need should increase both (a) adherence to the cultural norms in one's own culture in interactions with members of the ingroup culture and (b) adherence to the cultural norms in the foreign culture in interactions with members of this foreign culture.

Results from a recent study (Chao, Zhang, & Chiu, 2010) confirmed this prediction. The participants in this study were Master of Business Administration (MBA) students in China who had a fair amount of exposure to business practices in the United States. When queried about the cultural norms for allocating rewards in China and the United States, these participants correctly recognized the greater preference for the contribution rule in the United States and the greater preference for the equality rule in China. Among these participants, those with a higher need for cognitive closure favored the contribution rule more when making reward allocation in the United States and the equality rule more when making reward allocation in China. Furthermore, the extent of cultural identification did not weaken this result. On the contrary, Chinese cultural identification increased the perceived differences between American and Chinese cultures and rendered the perceived cultural differences in allocation rule preferences more discrete and real. As a consequence, the extent of cultural identification magnified the need for cognitive closure effect. Participants with a high need for cognitive closure favored the equality rule more in the Chinese context and

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the contribution rule more in the American context, particularly when they strongly identified with Chinese culture. In summary, although cultural identification and the need for cognitive closure tend to discourage intercultural learning, paradoxically, after individuals have acquired sufficient knowledge of a foreign culture through their multicultural experiences, cultural identification and the need for cognitive closure could reinforce discriminative application of cultural knowledge in intercultural encounters (see Chapter 5, this volume).

Conclusions

In conclusion, although the role of communication in cultural processes has been extensively discussed and researched, only a few studies have examined the role of multicultural experiences in intercultural communication. In this chapter, we filled this gap by suggesting a set of propositions regarding the relationship between multicultural experiences and intercultural communication. Specifically, we contend that exposure to multicultural experiences is positively related to effective intercultural communication because multicultural experiences afford opportunities for acquiring nuanced understanding of cross-cultural differences and for practicing discriminative application of cultural knowledge in intercultural interactions. Although the evidence reviewed in this chapter is still preliminary, it is consistent with this proposition. Also interestingly, we further posit that, on the one hand, the positive relationship between multicultural experiences and intercultural learning may be broken when cultural identification and the need for cognitive closure are heightened; on the other hand, after individuals have acquired sufficient nuanced knowledge of cultural differences, cultural identification and the need for cognitive closure could instead reinforce the tendency to apply cultural knowledge discriminatively when managing social situations in different cultural contexts.

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